



**Daily Devotionals – November 14 to November 20, 2020
To Encourage Franklin in Such a Time As This
By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson-- Franklin Baptist Church**

This brief series of daily devotionals are designed to speak into the days in which we live. But we frame that sacred time in the challenging days of the Covid-19 or Novel CoronaVirus that is spreading across our globe. Take in these daily words of devotion. We hope you will experience wisdom, perspective and yes even hope!

They draw from the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings by date.
(All scriptures will use the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted)

**Saturday, November 14 - Psalm 90:1-8, 12
by Dr. Charles Qualls
*Teach Us to Count Our Days***

- 1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.
- 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- 3 You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals."
- 4 For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.
- 5 You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; 6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.
- 7 For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed.
- 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
- 12 So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Devotion:

You ever see something in a different way if you turn your head a certain way and squint a little? The Hebrew behind our English translations will cause us to do that. I have a friend who has spent her career teaching Hebrew and Old Testament. She works in 14 languages of biblical understanding, including the incredibly tight-niched little world of "Ugaritic Hebrew." Her commentary on this stretch of the Psalms includes today's 90th one.

First of all, she points out that actually the 90th-92nd psalms are all connected to each other. They are best read together as belonging in a brief series. The questions that may have set them into motion stem from the 89th psalm. Here in the 90th, the Hebrew language that doesn't make it into our English translations will posture God as essentially giving "birth" to all of earth and life. Likewise, though attributed to "Moses," the imagery throughout these lead scholars to believe they date to the later period of the Babylonian exile.

Though our assigned verses today omit 9-11, when we stir them in we notice some heavy-duty reflection. The writer of this psalm considers the brief, fragile nature of life. They also give consideration to the cause-and-effect of sin or faithfulness of their people as they are now feeling God's "wrath." This kind of theology was prevalent in ancient Hebrew belief. The psalmist is wondering what went wrong.

What can we take from this? Well, 2020 has reminded us that life is indeed a fragile gift and that it can be all too brief. Life can end in an instant. How many families lost loved ones that they couldn't visit in hospitals or other care settings due to the pandemic? Otherwise young and healthy individuals succumbed to the ravages of the Covid-19 disease. One old friend of mine has a 21-year-old son who was a scholarship track athlete at a major university. His track career is now over because of lasting heart damage when he contracted the Coronavirus.

Verse 12 may be our keeper, though. **So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.** Don't let anyone tell you, "You think too much!" Far better to reflect, consider, care and become wise than to roll through life oblivious. The psalmist leaves us with the conclusion that we should live our days more aware. More reflective and proactively. Time itself accomplishes nothing. I don't want to waste my life. I want it to have mattered. It is up to me to use whatever days I have left as God would intend!

Prayer:

Lord, guide us to "count our days that we may gain a wise heart." Amen!

Sunday, November 15 - Matthew 25:14-30

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Parable of the Talents

25:14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.

29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Devotion:

Jesus foreshadowed or “foretold” his death, resurrection and ascension many times in the gospels before he was arrested. This *Parable of the Talents* is one of those times. If he had simply told this parable early in his ministry to challenge us to be faithful with what God has given to us (and taught us!), that would have been enough.

Now, if we hear it through the filters of an ascended Jesus who awaits return... we may hear the parable in its very best light.

Likewise, we simply cannot ignore that this parable comes directly after his *Parable of the Bridegroom*. Both of them portray an impending return of a powerful person, and the need of those who serve him to be in a state of *readiness*! Left to us is to understand that “ready” means being found faithful. Likewise, today, this parable impresses upon us that a faithful servant does something with the gifts God has given them (and with what they know and have been taught!), while an unfaithful servant buries their talent.

In other words, the disappointing servant simply didn’t do anything with what the Master had given them.

A “talent” was a specific unit of measure in the ancient world. One talent of money is thought to have been years worth of a typical wage or salary. One, five or ten talents, then, demonstrate that we who follow Jesus have been entrusted with much. Even one talent was a lot. We are expected to DO something with our gifts from God. Frank Tupper once said, "God can and does impart greater gifts to those who are faithful while those who distrust God can only lose what they have."

Now, the poor fig tree Jesus also talked about in the gospels comes to mind. It didn’t produce, and Jesus felt as though it should be cut down! No one cares that you or I “...believe in Jesus and are going to Heaven.” It’s vital to our personal eternity, but it’s not what Jesus was measuring us by here. Others do care about what kind of persons we are; in other words that we live in faithful ways that reflect Christ and make the world around us better. That seems to be the central message in Jesus’ parable.

Prayer:

Lord, find us faithful and not just believing. Help us to recognize what you have entrusted us with and to serve you actively. May you be pleased! Amen.

Monday, November 16 - Romans 2:1-11

by Dr. Charles Qualls

You Condemn Yourself

2 Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. 2 You say, “We know that God’s judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.” 3 Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 For he will repay according to each one’s deeds: 7 to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.

Devotion:

What is this one saying to us? What is this one not saying to us?

Knowing that someone may try to paint me into a corner on this, I'll be choosing my words and my thoughts carefully. This passage really isn't all that tricky; people are tricky though. Life can be a little complicated, as well. Maybe that's a good place to start.

Because everyone but you (or me) lives in black-and-white, I suppose that's how we can come to view faith. There is texture, nuance and shades of color to my life because it's mine. Everyone else's is a little easier for me to see, I can be quick to think.

- But I'm not in their shoes. So, I judge. I rush to conclusions.
- Their sins aren't my sins, and their struggles or circumstances aren't mine. So I judge.
- They are in my way, so I judge.
- They don't believe or think like I do, so I judge.
- Truthfully, I just don't like them. So I judge.

This is the game we play. Yes? Along comes the apostle Paul writing to the Romans. He says what he says in chapter 2 today. A voice inside us says something that begins with, "Yes, *but...*" and off we go! Trouble is, Jesus spoke to the matter also. He said the exact same thing.

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?"

So, are we just supposed to not have any standards? Are we just supposed to tolerate everything that is sinful? Is there no such thing as sin?

You know what I say to those good questions? "*No, but...*"

Prayer:

Lord, guide us to know that as we judge, we shall also be judged. Lead us to understand how rich the fellowship can be when we instead welcome and are glad to have each other, flaws and all. Help us to be humble enough to know that each of us should be just as relieved as anybody else to be welcomed into that same fellowship. Amen.

Tuesday, November 17 - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Final Exhortations, Greetings, and Benediction

12 But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; 13 esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. 15 See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Devotion:

Once again, the apostle Paul was writing to a church. Thessalonica, like all the churches, had good qualities and it had challenges. It had strong points and it had opportunities for growth.

Whether Paul was setting down a general expectation here, or whether he was thinking specifically of the Thessalonian church only in these sentences, we don't know. I do believe he would have said this particular message (v12-18) to any and all churches no matter what.

No pastor is perfect. I don't have to tell you that yours certainly isn't. I know some of my rough edges better than you, and still others I am probably blind to. But, Paul is speaking up on behalf of those who lead within churches. I am privileged to serve here with Steve Gibson, with a loving staff and with a talented cast of lay-leaders. They step up and are willing to say, "Yes!" to the work of the church. Sometimes we get things right, and at other times we may miss the mark. But Paul seems to tell the Thessalonians to have some respect for those called to the work of the ministry. To have some appreciation for those who give their lives to the cause. He calls on them to give thanks for those who are willing, because not all are.

When people say "yes" because the Nominating Committee has called, they are stepping out to bring substance where there could otherwise be void. When ministers commit to vocational service within churches, it isn't because there were no other career options. We feel a sacred call to bring light to where there could otherwise be darkness. We won't be perfect. We won't get it all right. But we are working and we do try! Paul calls upon the church to support and to pray for the servants in her midst.

Prayer:

Help us, Lord, to not take your servants for granted. Give us a sense of gratitude, and a willingness to pull alongside and to serve with them. For all the saints...Amen!

Wednesday, November 18 - Matthew 24:45-51

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave

⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. ⁴⁷ Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that wicked slave says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' ⁴⁹ and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. ⁵¹ He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Devotion:

I am writing this devotion on Election Day and there is an uneasiness in the air. People are wanting to cast their votes in a safe manner, and they desire their votes to be counted. Some are advocating knowing the official outcome tonight, while others are more concerned that the counting of votes is accurate, no matter how long the process takes. So many today are trying to work or attend school or be a parent. Whatever your path takes, you probably will check in with the news frequently.

Patience, while being a virtue, remains one of the most difficult emotions to control. After all, doesn't the election affect me? How will the election affect my family? How will the election affect my community?

We've been given the signs of his return, but yet we are anxious. We know what we are expected to do, but we lose focus. The signs are one thing, but with the demands of our schedule, we need to place this important time in our calendars. But, who are we trying to deceive? The Lord our God has knowledge of what we will say even before the thought is begun or even before it engages our voice. The assignment is quite clear -- we have been placed in charge of the master's household. This passage is chocked full of anticipating the return of the Messiah.

Theologian Jürgen Moltmann writes: “Men and women will find again with God not only the final moment, but their whole history...as the reconciled, the rectified, and healed and completed history of their whole lives.”

With this in mind, we can read this passage as good news that we are already blessed in this time. The Trinitarian God is *already* with them in the form of the Holy Spirit. The reality is that we are not alone because the Master is with them in an anticipatory way. They (and we) are living toward that future day when God will reconcile all of creation with God’s eternity.

The challenge for us today is to not lose focus. The challenge for us today is to be ready for the Master when the Master returns. The challenge of us today is to not neglect the ministry that God has given us. Maybe, the writer of Matthew reminds us that all of us are anxious about the future, and we do not know the day and time of the Master’s return. We work and watch hopefully in this present time, all the while trusting that God’s reign has already begun, and waiting expectantly for the Son to return! Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come!

Devotion:

Lord, give to us the ability to keep watch, always looking for your return. Amen

Thursday, November 19 - Psalm 100

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

A Psalm of Thanksgiving

¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

² Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

³ Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

⁵ For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Devotion:

Psalm 100 continues to be an extremely popular Psalm, and is one of the Psalms that young people at church would memorize. Its five verses are chocked full of meaning.

The Psalm begins with a universal summons to praise God. God is to be praised because a cosmic sovereign demands nothing less than a cosmic response! This greeting is an appropriate greeting for a monarch. Because of this, all the cosmos, earth and everything and everyone are summoned to “make a joyful noise.” This joyful noise is for the worship of God. A joyful noise could indicate jubilant speech and song. To offer worship to God also speaks of God’s sovereignty. Worship implies that our life and priorities are changed -- from us to God.

The image of royalty is also underscored with the importance of “come into his presence.” We are being ushered into God’s very presence to offer our praise. Because of the relationship that we have with God, we are encouraged to “serve the Lord.”

This Psalm teaches us about God, how to worship God and why we should worship God. In verses 3-5 we are reminded that God made us to be the sheep of his pasture. Notice that God did not ask us to assist, this is all God’s initiative. If it were not for God’s initiative, we would not enjoy fellowship with God.

Psalm 100 is the basis for the Doxology that we sing in church:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
praise Him all creatures here below,
praise Him above ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The instruction aspect and the brevity of Psalm 100 reinforces its popularity in today's world. The concept of belonging is one that is easy to understand. Because God made us, we are not our own and both our duty and delight comes when we offer praise to God.

The Reformed Tradition has utilized this Psalm well throughout the years. Psalm 100 is the basis for the very first question and answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Question: What is the chief end of humankind?

Answer: The chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

Psalm 100 is a call to arms for the Christian to know God, to recognize that we are God's because God created us, and to worship and enjoy God forever and ever.

Prayer:

Guide us, dear Lord, that we our worship might be acceptable to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Friday, November 20 - Isaiah 40:1-11

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

God's People Are Comforted

40 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Devotion:

The beginning of Chapter 40 marks a radical departure from the chapters that precede it. This section begins the section that will discuss God's majesty and God's coming that will rule the earth and all its people. God will reunite Israel and Judah and restore them to their former glory. Chapter 40 speaks to the restoration after the exile.

Judah has had turmoil and trouble for some time now. So God, in God's mercy instructs Isaiah to "speak tenderly to Jerusalem." This word was like a two edged sword that ushers in blessing and comfort, but also adversity. Because Israel had experienced turmoil for many years, God knew that they needed comfort. The opening verse spells out comfort, not once, but twice. We're told that this speech is tender in the fact that her sins had been paid in full, that her hard service is now over. Because of how hardened the people must have been, the word comfort is repeated, as if Israel might have missed this good news the first time.

Then we hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness, reminiscent of John the Baptist in John 1:18. Do you comprehend all that is entailed in preparing a straight highway? At the very least it includes removing obstacles that would prevent us from encountering the Lord. This also speaks to the desert as having both trials and sufferings. We are reminded that we are not immune to trials and sufferings, but these need not hinder our faith. The prophet told the people to be prepared to see God at work. These words also serve as a reminder for each of us to "prepare the way of the Lord."

The next verses (6-8) compares people to grass. Of course, we are much more important to God than grass, but it serves as a reminder that we are finite creatures and God is infinite. It is when we put our trust in God that we are able to navigate the changing tides of public opinion. We place our hope in God and trust in God's unfailing plan for us.

Verses 9-11 are rich in imagery and importance. They remind us that the truly mighty are the ones that care for the defenseless and the vulnerable. The image of a mighty king coming is one that many people yearn for, but God has chosen not to work in that manner. While it is true that our Sovereign is all powerful, God also tends his flock like a shepherd.

It is telling that Isaiah moves from might in verse 10 to tenderness in verse 11. While it is true that God is all powerful, it is also true that God shows God's strength in weakness. If God moves among and works among the most vulnerable, what does that teach us about ministry today? While every person is important to God, God cares deeply for those who are marginalized and are cut off from the mainstream. This describes the need for many ministries that support children and low income families. This also explains how the birth of Jesus was shared with shepherds before the ruling class.

This passage reminds me that:

God's comfort is always available.

God is making level places out of mountains and valleys.

God's glory will be revealed to all people.

God's love of and care for us is like that of a shepherd, who feeds and cares for the sheep, who leads the sheep, and carries the sheep in his bosom.

This God, although all powerful, is also capable of displaying his tender love for all!

Prayer:

God of comfort, allow us to trust you enough that we can understand your comfort. Amen.