



**Daily Devotionals – January 9 to January 15, 2021  
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, January 9 - Psalm 29  
by Dr. Charles Qualls  
*The Voice of God in a Great Storm***

- 1 Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor.
- 3 The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters.
- 4 The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
- 5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.
- 8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 9 The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!"
- 10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
- 11 May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!

**Devotion:**

I want us to hear the power and presence that is ascribed to God in this psalm. I think its implications for our faith are timeless. We need this very kind of God in our lives for the living of these days.

So, if you rushed through -- or didn't read the psalm -- go back and take a minute. Breathe. Then, take it in.

God's mere presence brings into submission the vast powers of heaven and nature. I have mentioned to you previously here in these devotions that the threatening, roaring notion of waters -- raining down, rolling over or washing in -- were one of the most fearsome symbols the ancients used to describe the fears of life. Here, God simply roars over the thundering waters. No match.

The beautiful and towering Cedars of Lebanon could be stirred by God like you taking the tip of your finger and running it through your coffee. The Lord had flashed fire during Elijah's contest against the king's priests of Baal. Floods are no match for God's presence.

You know what speaks to me most, though, in this psalm about God's presence and power? That for the most part, God is represented here in the same way Genesis depicted the Creation events. God's voice is enough to have power over our living. Do you trust?

**Prayer:**

God of our days, may we listen for your still small voice. For that quiet voice holds power over this, and every other realm there is. May we trust in you, even today. Amen.

**Sunday, January 10 - Mark 1:4-11**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***One Who is More Powerful***

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

**Devotion:**

The purpose of John the Baptist's preaching was to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. As we move through Epiphany and beyond, our opportunity is to see how Jesus' essence is revealed. This text from Mark 1 is so revealing! Take your time and pay attention, as you read, to what is said about Jesus. Even the voice of God-the-Father will add crucial words of blessing.

A wise mentor figure with whom I worked used to speak now and then about "the passing of the blessing." He believed this was an essential part of being reflections of God. We get opportunities in our lives to be people who don't just hoard God's blessing. We don't keep it for ourselves, but instead get the chance to visit words of encouragement, affirmation and empowerment on others just as we have received. Here, both John's and God's voices speak blessings onto Jesus.

That is more than just a "nice" thing to read here. As we pay attention to what they say, we learn more about God. Not just an earthly Jesus. This would be a presence of God, in human form, that people would have to reckon with. Still today, part of the journey of faith is determining whether we have room enough for Jesus in our lives. Will we accommodate the shaping presence of Jesus Christ?

How we prepare a place for Jesus -- a major theme of John's preaching -- is a necessary task. We may say all the right things about Jesus. We may want to have Jesus in our lives. But if there is no room, we are not

prepared. If we do not understand who he is and what Jesus is about -- including the costly and risky parts of life with him -- we are not prepared. If we only enjoy his teachings, but ultimately decide they pertain more to others than to us, we are not prepared.

Jesus went out to hear John preach, and responded by getting into the water. What does Jesus demand of us in response to the true message, the long-awaited Messiah?

**Prayer:**

Lord, help me to make room. Today, please just help me to prepare myself by making room for you to be God, and to realize that I don't have to be. Amen.

**Monday, January 11 - Psalm 69:1-5, 30-36**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Save Me***

1 Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

2 I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.

3 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

4 More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; many are those who would destroy me, my enemies who accuse me falsely. What I did not steal must I now restore?

5 O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

30 I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.

31 This will please the Lord more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.

32 Let the oppressed see it and be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive.

33 For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own that are in bonds.

34 Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them.

35 For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah; and his servants shall live there and possess it; 36 the children of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall live in it.

**Devotion:**

Although this psalm is attributed to David, we actually have no clear idea who wrote it. Certainly, there were moments in king David's life that could have supported his authorship. What is more obvious, though, is the honest strife the poet is feeling.

This is the cry unto God that arises from deep within the human soul.

This writer is carrying heavy weight. Some believe he may have been a religious reformer, straining against the powers of a Hebrew church that was growing increasingly addicted to the Law and to its unjust system of sacrifices. Others believe the person has taken a costly stand on a matter that leaves him, for a time, feeling alone in his viewpoint. Whatever the circumstance, most of us have known the feeling.

The isolation, loneliness and despair are fairly universal. So, what does he want from God?

He does not claim to be perfect. To that, we can relate. What he does ask of God is to be “saved.” That is, to be saved from the moment and circumstances that overwhelm him at the moment. If you read the verses we are not assigned, but that fill out Psalm 69, on balance this is so beautifully human. He seems to want God to give him a hearing, and not just for his case. A hearing of what he feels. A listening ear and a presence.

Toward the end, in v30-36, the tone shifts. Now, we are inspired by his faith. Despite his hardship and suffering, his faith has not flagged. He claims a hope, even while waiting for God to deliver him. He will praise God, lift God up before others, and place his confidence in the ability of the Almighty.

**Prayer:**

Lord, it's easy to believe in you when everything is good. It's easy to be a person of faith when we feel like we're winning. Help us to grow our faith now, that when hardship comes, we might still place our hope in you! Amen.

**Tuesday, January 12 - Acts 22:2-16**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Paul Tells of His Conversion***

2 When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. Then he said: 3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

6 “While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ 8 I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Then he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’ 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 I asked, ‘What am I to do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.’ 11 Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

12 “A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, 13 came to me; and standing beside me, he said, ‘Brother Saul, regain your sight!’ In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. 14 Then he said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; 15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.’

**Devotion:**

“People can't change. They just don't.”

We've all heard someone say that. My goodness, most of us probably have said it at some point. In some ways, and to some extent, it's true. However, if I can't believe that Jesus Christ can change me, I shouldn't be doing what I'm doing. I've seen it. Our whole faith, at its true core, is based on the notion that God's active work in our lives can and must transform us.

The apostle Paul didn't just get saved for eternity. He got saved from being the Zealot Saul. He was a persecutor on behalf of the church. Saul had the power to beat, jail or even execute Christians. Now in this dramatic story we read today, Jesus Christ literally stopped him in his tracks and changed him.

You may recall that in Acts 7, the very first recorded Christian martyr died at the feet of Saul. Saul had incited the crowd, held their cloaks, and frothed them up to the point that they stoned Stephen to death. Now, Jesus Christ himself was speaking to Saul and causing him to get on a different path. The one that would lead him to become "Paul."

What makes it possible for God to reshape us? How can God possibly change some people so drastically? Deep down inside so many of us, there is that part of us that is just not working if it isn't aligned with God in Christ. Paul will retell this same conversion story in Acts 26. In that version, the voice says to him "Why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads."

*Goads* were spiked sticks used to keep oxen or mules working in the field. If the animal got lazy or stubborn, just a quick poke with a long stick down around an ox's back hooves would get the wayward animal moving. There was no incentive for them to kick backwards, only to be poked by the spikes. The Spirit essentially says to him, "It hurts you to kick against the goads" of who God made you to be.

So it does!

**Prayer:**

Lord, lead me and reshape me. Guide me to become who you want me to be. Give me the courage to trust the version of me that you envision. Amen.

**Wednesday, January 13 - John 1:29-34**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***The Lamb of God***

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" <sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

<sup>32</sup> And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

**Devotion:**

John the Baptist continues to baptize, but yet he has his eye out for the appearance of Jesus. John knew his objective, to point others to Jesus. As such, when John recognized Jesus, he proclaimed, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (V29) John's mission was now complete; from now on he would continue to point others to Jesus, the Messiah.

When John observed the Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus, his prophecy was fulfilled -- this is Jesus, God's Son. This Jesus will baptize, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy to notice that there is not any indication in John's Gospel that Jesus was baptized in this passage. It is also significant to notice that baptism of the Spirit does not contain any emotional response.

Jesus baptizes anew with the "words of eternal life" (6:68). This new life is more concerned with the quality of life, not the quantity of life. This is only partially fulfilled until the death and resurrection of Jesus. The central point of Jesus being the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world is still present today in the Communion Service.

The Gospel of John offers an incarnational theory of the atonement. The heart of Christology in John's Gospel is the incarnation. This does not neglect or dampen the importance of Jesus' death upon a cross, but is concerned with the uniting of the divine in human form. Jesus makes the possibility of new life for all a reality because of his uniqueness -- the divine has combined with the human form. The divine makes remission of sin available while the human understands our plight and makes intercession for us.

In John's Gospel, the Lamb is sacrificed for us. The Lamb of God that suffers and dies on the cross is not independent from God. Reminiscent of Philippians 2:6-11, John reports that Jesus' death was a divine self-emptying. In essence, God giving of God's own self was put to death by people who were impervious to what was happening. In the terminology of John's Gospel, Jesus died because of our sins. If we are blinded or resistant to the message of God in Christ, we are reassured that the Lamb of God takes away our sin by shining light into the crevasses of our spiritual darkness, and by doing so, makes new life possible.

**Prayer:**

Lamb of God, please shine your light into our darkness and give us new life this year. Amen.

**Thursday, January 14 - 2 Corinthians 10:1-11**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Paul Defends His Ministry***

10 I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away! <sup>2</sup> I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; <sup>4</sup> for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments <sup>5</sup> and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. <sup>6</sup> We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

<sup>7</sup> Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we. <sup>8</sup> Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. <sup>9</sup> I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters. <sup>10</sup> For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." <sup>11</sup> Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present.

**Devotion:**

The central theme of this passage is how gentleness and clemency can be understood in the context of God's power. Contrary to popular opinion, gentleness and compassion are not signs of weakness. It takes a strong person not to respond in kind to a wrong, and it takes a stronger person to extend forgiveness and to be kind in the face of adversity.

While God is all powerful and nothing can prevail against God, there is still room for self's freedom to act. Just because God's power is unlimited, this does not indicate that God will not allow our free will in making decisions. There are two possible outcomes: if we oppose God and God's plan, then we should not be surprised by being overwhelmed. In the final analysis, God's kingdom, purpose and reign will not be thwarted, regardless of our actions. If we work with God's plan, our self-determination will play out in our stewardship of God's resources and how we work in kingdom work.

This passage teaches us to show compassion toward others because we have experienced compassion. God's grace has not given us what our sinful selves deserve, but rather the love of God.

Lastly, Paul's point concerning walking in the flesh does not equate to walking according to the flesh. Paul's point is that our choices and values are to come from God and not from this world. We are called to live in the world without allowing the world to influence our decisions.

In this New Year, may we live in the world, not of the world.

**Prayer:**

Powerful God, teach us that our best decisions are made when our eyes are focused on you. Amen.

**Friday, January 15 - Acts 13:16-25**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Paul Preaching in Antioch***

<sup>16</sup> So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak:

"You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen. <sup>17</sup> The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. <sup>18</sup> For about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness.

<sup>19</sup> After he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance <sup>20</sup> for about four hundred fifty years. After that he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel. <sup>21</sup> Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul, son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. <sup>22</sup> When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.'

<sup>23</sup> Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised; <sup>24</sup> before his coming John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. <sup>25</sup> And as John was finishing his work, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals on his feet

**Devotion:**

This passage of Scripture has Paul sharing a word of exhortation to the hearers and readers of his words. In a manner similar to Stephen's speech found in Acts 7:1-53, Paul draws attention to the fact that Jesus is a descendant of David, thus a Jesus is a royal Messiah, opposed to a prophet-like Messiah after Moses' lineage. Paul recounts the salvation history of the Israeli people, careful not to spend too much time on any one person or era, with the exception of Samuel.

As you recall, the people asked God to make the prophet Samuel their national king. Paul's point is this -- Jesus fulfills all the requirements of a national king according to the testimony of Scripture. This reminds the reader of the removal of Saul as king and David is ascended to the throne. This is a foreshadowing of God raising up Jesus as Israel's promised ruler. Jesus is the prophesied Savior that comes from David's royal lineage.

Paul further explains that the promised kingdom has been realized with Israel's repentance, and is marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit which is God's promise.

What lessons can we learn from this passage?

- 1) What is the role of the church in rivals within the church?
- 2) What is our response to the rejection of the Gospel?

3) Paul was an urban missionary who served in many different cities and places. How does that shape our ministry?

Whatever your answer to these questions, the bottom line is this -- God wants everyone to hear and receive the good news of salvation.

**Prayer:**

Holy God, thank you for trusting us to spread the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. Amen.