



**Daily Devotionals – February 20 to February 26, 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, February 20 - Psalm 25:1-10
by Dr. Charles Qualls
*I Trust***

1 In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.

2 I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

3 No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

4 Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.

5 Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

6 Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.

7 Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

10 All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

Devotion:

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.

Okay. I'm not speaking in hyperbole here. What I need to say in the beginning is that this sentence is one of THE biggest ticket theological issues of our entire faith. *How much do I trust God?* is a question that you probably never ask yourself consciously. However, you more than likely ask it unconsciously every single day.

So much of our faith rests on the degree to which we trust God. Try these statements of belief on for size:

- *I believe in God and am willing to place my hopes for eternity on the promises made in Jesus Christ.*
- *I believe that God's teachings could actually work for my real life. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" is something I try to live by.*
- *I give to the church as my primary charitable exercise because I believe God has called me to do so.*
- *I have forgiven someone who wronged me terribly, and knew what they were doing when they did it. I have forgiven them because my faith in God compels me to.*
- *I am willing to let God be Lord of my life rather than relying on my own abilities.*

Any one of these statements, and dozens-upon-dozens of others that you could make, will all rest on the issue of how much you do... or do not... trust God.

Want to get the most out of today's scripture reading that you can? Go back and reread Psalm 25:1-10 now in light of what you've just heard me say. See if it sounds any different.

Prayer:

Lord of our days, may we reckon with how much we trust you. For all that we believe rests on this one dynamic. Amen.

Sunday, February 21 - Genesis 9:8-17

by Dr. Charles Qualls

My Covenant With You

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Devotion:

Nostalgia can be a very comfortable place. In fact, the Bible calls us to remember. But nostalgia that does not turn to faith in the future leads to nothing. That's what fellow pastor Jeff Roberts says.

I think the timing is good when we consider the transitions that each biblical "covenant" has brought about. Today, we read about God's covenant with Noah. It marked a rebirth of sorts for all of Creation. The overwhelming flood has taken place. Now in the aftermath, how will God relate to humanity?

We acknowledge that starting over is risky, dangerous, uncertain and scary. Any time we are forced from, or even choose to leave, our accustomed place we feel fearful. We can even be excited about a new chapter we have chosen. But even if for only a moment, there will be some trepidation.

Sometimes, nostalgia can look like a safe and comfortable place to stay. But when what has been happening has not been working, there is little choice. God is promising now in our Genesis 9 scripture to work with all the existing Creation moving forward. Never again will a flood wipe out life so comprehensively. Future covenants have found God enacting creative new solutions to issues. Especially in the Mosaic Law and in Christ, God was committing to work with us as we were.

How has God been faithful to us? How are we expected to be faithful to God under our current covenant? How do we get indicators that God still remembers and loves us?

These are all issues attendant to this scripture. Like the rainbow, established here in our story today, we all look for ways to tell that God is still with us. We watch for signs that God is still active with us. We long for reminders that we still belong with God, and that God is present in our lives. Guess what -- those are the kinds of things God looks for from us, too!

Prayer:

Lord, may we be mindful that you have made a covenant with us. We are now called upon to faithfully keep up our end of the deal. Today, I will think on this. Amen.

Monday, February 22 - Ephesians 2:1-10

by Dr. Charles Qualls

God Who is Rich in Mercy

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Devotion:

This next paragraph will be so important for you to read. I didn't say it would be exciting, though.

It's hard for us to place ourselves in 1st century Palestine and beyond. So, it's also difficult for us to hear the nuances of scripture as they would have been heard there and then. Once in a while, we ought to admit that. If we lose touch with the notion that we are 21st century Americans reading an English translation of a Hebrew or Greek manuscript, we can think we grasp the richness and context of scripture more than we do.

Paul has moved forward in a theme that he had already started, as chapter 2 begins. That central theme was this -- "The working of God's mighty power." When he says here --

You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient...6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

-- the apostle was breaking some serious news. You see, the ancient Hebrews and Greeks had no concept of Heaven quite as we do. They believed that when you died, you simply "died." That was it.

Now, he speaks of newness in life for people who were given up for spiritual "dead" before. Not from their own "works," lest anyone should boast, they have been raised. And, we too just like them! God has *made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.*

We have been created not just for a hope in a heavenly realm someday. Paul makes the case, instead, that we have been freed from death here and now. Freed to live in newness of life and to do the important things that bring life to others!

Prayer:

Lord, help us to bring life to those we know. Guide us to understand our own "death," so that while we yet live...we might rise in newness of life in you! Amen.

Tuesday, February 23 - Psalm 77
by Dr. Charles Qualls
God's Mighty Deeds Recalled

1 I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.

2 In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.

3 I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints. Selah

4 You keep my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

5 I consider the days of old, and remember the years of long ago.

6 I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit: 7 "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?"

8 Has his steadfast love ceased forever? Are his promises at an end for all time?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah

10 And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed."

11 I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; I will remember your wonders of old.

12 I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds.

13 Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God?

14 You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples.

15 With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

16 When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled.

17 The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side.

18 The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook.

19 Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen.

20 You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Devotion:

Y'all. I almost didn't write anything after this psalm. I nearly just let you read it and pray. Maybe I should have.

You almost foul this powerful reflection with more words. So, simply know this -- if you connect with this psalm, you probably connect deeply with it. If you do not, then stop what you are doing just now and give thanks.

But one day you will. You will no doubt connect. When you do, I hope that a testimony like this of God's mighty power will speak into the uncertainty of the day. Or night. Yeah, the nights....

The apostle Paul later said this --

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8: 26-27)

In the dark nights of the soul, all we may sometimes have are the groanings of our soul. God in Spirit is able to transform even those to prayers. Prayers that the Lord is mighty enough and faithful enough to one day answer.

Prayer:

God of our bright days and God of our dark nights, hear our prayers. Actually, on this day we are thankful that you do. May we trust in your power and love. Amen.

Wednesday, February 24 - Matthew 4:1-11

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Temptation of Jesus

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it

is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Devotion:

The temptation of Jesus provides much to consider and ponder. First, this account mirrors the wanderings of Israel in the desert, with one notable exception -- Jesus did not yield to the temptation. In all the areas of temptation, Jesus rebuked Satan with scripture. Jesus, once again, teaches all who have a desire to learn.

Second, the purpose of the temptation was to either prove or disprove Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. Israel had a history of many coming claiming to be a messiah, but they failed. Jesus did not succumb to the temptation, in fact, he did just the opposite -- he overcame the temptation.

Third, the temptations of Jesus foreshadow the temptations that you and I will face in our lives. Do we celebrate the gifts of God as gifts to us, or do we turn the gifts into personal idols? Because God is our provider does not mean that our physical well-being is the point. Jesus countered that with verse four, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Power allows God's people to serve God's purposes, but Jesus refuses to allow power to become an end to itself. Jesus, like us, was tempted to place God at our own personal disposal, but Jesus remains true to his calling by remaining at God's disposal.

The temptation that all of us face today is to love the gifts of God more than the giver. Our temptation might be to measure God's value by the realization of our own desires instead of God's will.

In these pandemic days, we tend to look for an easy answer. If only we can receive the vaccine, then everything will return to normal. We long for the days gone by, the good old days before Covid. In our rush to return to our former schedule, we can shortchange God. The way to God is through the cross of Christ. The way to God is through the taking up of our cross to follow Christ. The true Messiah died on the cross and encouraged everyone who wanted to be his disciple to "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

St. Augustine said it best in his famous *Confessions* (1.1)

You have made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they find rest in you.

Prayer:

Gracious and forgiving God, remind us that you are the answer to all of our questions. Amen.

Thursday, February 25 - Romans 3:21-31

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Righteousness Through Faith

²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one; and he will

justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Devotion:

In this section of Romans, Paul's teaching is focused on the righteousness that can be obtained by faith. For Jewish Christians, this is a difficult concept to grasp because they have been taught that righteousness came through obedience to the law. This teaching is a radical departure for them -- all that they had been taught is being cast aside for this new teaching.

What is important to remember is that faith is the key to righteousness. Faith holds the key to salvation, not the law. This new way of teaching emphatically states that our works do not connect us to salvation. Salvation is available to everyone who has faith, and this salvation reveals the righteousness of God.

The faith that Paul speaks of is faith through our Lord Jesus Christ. This faith is redemptive -- this faith brings *back* to God those of us who have fallen away from God. This faith allows belief that in Christ we find atonement for our sins. Atonement removes the penalty of our sin and makes us righteous before God. When Christ removed the penalty of our sins committed, we are now in a right relationship with God -- we are now justified.

One other concept is introduced -- God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Paul takes great pains to teach the plain truth that God is God of *all*! So, whether we are Jew or Gentile, our response is to have faith in God through Jesus Christ. Once this is established, the door to salvation is graciously open for us.

Prayer:

Thank you God for making provision for everyone to know, love and serve you. Amen.

Friday, February 26 - Romans 4:1-12

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Example of Abraham

¹ What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

⁶ So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin."

⁹ Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." ¹⁰ How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, ¹² and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Devotion:

The debate between faith verses works has raged on for millennia. But, what is the connection or lack thereof between the two? I will make an attempt to answer that question.

If a person is saved by their works, then their salvation is dependent on their works and not on God's sovereign will. Conversely, if a person that is saved by God's gracious act does not have works, where is the proof of their salvation? Salvation is either dependent on God or it is not dependent on God.

Paul carefully and thoughtfully weighs into this raging controversy, and Paul's words are instructive for us today. His argument speaks of their ancestor Abraham. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. (V3b)

To those who want to use works as their justification for salvation overlook that the wages gained from works are not a gift, but payment for work completed.

So far, so good. But the ability to counter a lifelong understanding does not come easily. Others seem to say that there can be no salvation apart from circumcision, because circumcision was the sign of righteousness. This was a powerful argument that had many followers.

Paul's counter was that righteousness comes from God alone, regardless of the symbols that we hold dear. Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. (V9b) This righteousness was not dependent on Abraham's circumcision or uncircumcision, but on the will of God.

Why would God alter our belief system? God chose to use Abraham our ancestor as our example. Abraham received circumcision by faith and his ancestors would likewise receive righteousness by faith.

What can we glean from this passage? I believe that the most important lesson is that God's will and way is beyond our comprehension. God in God's mercy reaches out to us in our condition, picks us up, dusts us off and then remakes us in God's image. Simply put, it is God's prerogative to do whatever God desires to do. Our response is to simply worship and adore God for the abundance of grace, mercy and love offered to us.

Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for rescuing us from a life of sin and rebellion. Equip us to follow you more completely, day by day. Amen.