



**Daily Devotionals – March 13 to March 19, 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, March 13 - John 3:1-13  
by Dr. Charles Qualls  
*Nicodemus Visits Jesus***

1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

**Devotion:**

Reckon what Nicodemus was doing out running around in the dark?

Some believe he was sneaking around because the question he wanted to ask Jesus was from his heart, rather than for his job. There is no indication that he is trying to entrap Jesus in any way. Most of the time in the gospels, we get a narrative note that tells us what the Pharisees are up to. Not so in our scripture today.

So, Nicodemus was a Pharisee. But he just may have been coming around to Jesus' ways and teachings. That would put him at odds with his fellow religious officials. Later, we'll see him get in trouble with fellow Pharisees because of a stand he'll take regarding "The Way," as it would soon become known.

We'll feel Jesus pushing just a bit here with the answers to Nicodemus' questions. After all, Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Jesus was toughest on them because they did less with what they knew in the Hebrew faith than just about anyone else. But for our purposes, let's pay attention to the heart of Jesus' answer: You must be born again from above. Jesus wasn't just talking about gaining entrance to heaven someday. He was talking about a transformation that the truly saved can receive from God. A rebirth of who they are that will not leave them where Jesus found them.

Would you say you're a different person because of your faith? Or would you say that you are "saved"? There is a difference, and obviously both matter.

**Prayer:**

Lord, open our hearts and minds to what we do not understand in the faith. We believe; help thou our unbelief. Amen.

**Sunday, March 14 - Ephesians 2:1-10**  
**by Dr. Charles Qualls**  
***Created in Christ For Good Works***

1 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.

3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ -- by grace you have been saved -- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God -- 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

**Devotion:**

This is Lent, a season when we focus on repentance. Every time I see the word "repentance" pop up in a lesson, I suppose in any study group or sanctuary there will be two disparate reactions. First, someone will sigh and think "Finally...they're talking about something that matters. We don't talk about repentance enough." At the same time, someone across the room rolls their eyes and thinks, "Here we go -- it's going to get heavy-handed now."

Could the truth of our faith be found somewhere in-between? Even if we are Christians -- even if we have been...for a long time -- we still commit sins and need to repent.

The apostle Paul called the Ephesian Christians to consider that one of God's gifts is to empower us. God not only longs to forgive, but to help us overcome influences, powers and forces that once dominated us. I would hurry to add that God can transform the lazy assumptions and the ingrained biases that so shape our thoughts or ways. As we tune in today, Paul was telling them of the loving God...who can transform and renew lives!

A stroll up the sidewalks in the ruins of ancient Ephesus today makes it obvious that they were replete with riches and distractions. In the midst of an affluent and cultured life, Paul lobbied for them to have room for God.

Here, Paul lifts up for these ancient believers, and for us, an image of a loving God. A God who will not grant us salvation merely because of our good works. But a God who is eager to save us so that our transformed

lives will do good works. How has God freed you from sin so that you were able to live in newness of life? How does God long to transform you still?

**Prayer:**

Reshape us, Lord. Help us who claim to be Christian humble ourselves...to repent of our wrongs...and to allow your transformation. Amen.

**Monday, March 15 - Hebrews 3:1-6**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Moses a Servant, Christ a Son***

1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, 2 was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also “was faithful in all God’s house.” 3 Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)

5 Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. 6 Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

**Devotion:**

I think I’ve got an aversion to “partners” here in v3 of our text today. I try not to be one of those people who get hung up on some little nothing, and simply can’t move past that to the larger picture. Here’s the deal -- in a faith context, “partners” got misused and abused so badly over the last few decades by slimy, Charlatan TV preachers. “Send us a donation and you’ll be a partner...”

I think I became a little allergic to the word back then.

Yet, in this context I need to push past that because this word *partner* is so vivid. It holds riches for us, and a key to understanding our fuller role with God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews goes on here to use Moses as a touchpoint to set Jesus in some perspective. As great and venerated as Moses was, he pales in comparison with a great builder vs. that builder’s greatest house. Likewise, again he uses Moses to suggest that Moses was to God’s house a “servant,” but Jesus is to God’s house a Son.

Take your time. Work through this one. Take in each sentence and phrase. Ask your questions of the text. Because as partners with God in Christ, we are to likewise claim our place and get busy doing the things God wishes of us.

**Prayer:**

God of our days, thank you for attending to us, and for saving us, through the high priest Jesus Christ. May we emulate him as faithful partners, serving and giving as he has. Amen.

**Tuesday, March 16 - Psalm 107**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Many Troubles***

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

2 Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble 3 and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

4 Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; 5 hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

6 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; 7 he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town.

8 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.

9 For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.

10 Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in misery and in irons, 11 for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

12 Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down, with no one to help.

13 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; 14 he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder.

15 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.

16 For he shatters the doors of bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron.

**Devotion:**

I talked with one friend recently during the pandemic. He had a forced quarantine after testing positive for the virus. For him, the sickness itself was rather mild. He is thankful. But he did have some symptoms. For instance, he lost his senses of taste and smell. For safety and healing, he was forced to stay home for three weeks. When he finally felt better, he said the smallest things were suddenly huge.

A car ride just to run an errand was like a great adventure. Seeing someone, albeit still from a safe six-foot distance, was like winning a social lottery of some kind. His isolation during those weeks had taken a toll he hadn't anticipated. Being able to go back to work felt incredibly freeing for him, and he vowed to no longer take that for granted. Eventually, the lost senses of smell and taste began to catch up. He said one day that the aroma of baking bread hit him, and it was one of the first things he had smelled in weeks.

The psalmist captures a similar dynamic for us here, I believe.

We all long for a place to call "home." That can be a literal, physical location. I think we all like to be grounded with a familiar space that feels like it's ours. But obviously, we can wander a bit in our souls. We can wander in unfamiliar spiritual territory, or we can feel like some aspect of our life has gotten a bit out of control.

Here, we have four (4) distinct groups described in Psalm 107, according to my friend Nancy deClaisse-Walford. There are wanderers, prisoners, sick persons and shipwrecked sailors. All who have found rescue and a home of sorts in God. These ancients who are at the center of our faith roots actually were largely unwanted. Then, when they did make a home, there were outsiders who wanted to take it from them.

Reread Psalm 107:1-16. Search your heart for a season of your life when you have longed for home. Give thanks to God for the times when you have found it!

**Prayer:**

Lord, we thank you that you are a safe refuge and a home for us. May we never take for granted what feeds our souls in you. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 17 - John 8:12-20**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Jesus the Light of the World***

<sup>12</sup> Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." <sup>13</sup> Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." <sup>14</sup> Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. <sup>15</sup> You judge by human standards; I judge no one. <sup>16</sup> Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.

<sup>17</sup> In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. <sup>18</sup> I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf." <sup>19</sup> Then they said to him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." <sup>20</sup> He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

**Devotion:**

All of us are familiar with TV's "talking heads." They are pro and con to whatever issue is featured on the show, and often cannot be heard because both are talking at the same time. When this happens, the listener must think, "I tuned in to discover more about a particular topic, but this was a complete waste of time." Neither of the "talking heads" answered a single question because they were talking over each other and not *listening* to each other's answers.

Jesus must have experienced something like this. Being focused on God's plan and purpose, Jesus had a lot to teach in a very short time. Impatient people continually interrupted Jesus because they had urgent business. What could be more important than learning about God's love for us?

Jesus forthrightly states that he is the light of the world, yet the Pharisees demand to know who has validated his testimony. Jesus simply states that his testimony does not need a witness. Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder shares this insight.

The Feast of the Tabernacles (or Sukkot) sets the historical context for this scene, in which the Gospel equates Jesus with Light. The festival recalled Israel's sojourn in the wilderness after the exodus. Lampstands symbolizing the light of God were a staple in the temple and a common feature in this and other Jewish Holy Days.

Thus the reference to "Jesus as light" is no accident. John wants to give the reader a window into the religious significance of this declaration.

Jesus connects himself to the temple and is also a "symbol" of the presence of God. He is the light of God for all to see.

The theme of Jesus as light is a continuing theme for John that began in Chapter 1 (v 4-5). It is clear by this point in the Gospel that Jesus and the Pharisees were on a collision course. This Gospel continues headlong down a path that leads to death, and by that death, Jesus is revealed to all that he is the light of the world. Not the Pharisees, nor the Roman Government, nor the High Priest, nor the wrath and power of death is able to extinguish the Light.

Will you allow the light of Jesus to invade your life? In my life? If so, what would Jesus find? How would our actions change? As we draw ever closer to the cross, we are keenly aware of the work that we need to do.

**Prayer:**

Forgiving God, may our lives be a reflection of your Light that all may see. Amen.

**Thursday, March 18 - Hebrews 4:1-13**  
**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**  
***The Rest That God Promised***

1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. <sup>2</sup>For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. <sup>3</sup>For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "As in my anger I swore, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup>For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." <sup>5</sup>And again in this place it says, "They shall not enter my rest." <sup>6</sup>Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup>again he sets a certain day -- "today" -- saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

<sup>8</sup>For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. <sup>9</sup>So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; <sup>10</sup>for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. <sup>11</sup>Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

<sup>12</sup>Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

**Devotion:**

This letter to the Hebrews contains information that is vital to our faith journeys. Today's passage takes into account the ability to enter into the rest promised by God. We also are reminded that no one or creature is hidden before God, and we appear as naked and laid bare. Beyond the immediate embarrassment, we realize that God knows all, even if we are embarrassed by the details.

It appears that the Hebrew Christians were confused about how this new religion should fit into their Jewish religion. The old religion had ceremonies, rituals, commandments and prophets described in great detail. This was the religion that they knew and practiced for so many years. But then Christ came and everything changed. Christ had fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. Christ had conquered sin and shattered all the barriers between God and humanity. Christ had offered eternal life for free! How do we practice a hybrid religion between the Jews and the Christians?

This passage begins with a common human emotion, that the difficulties of today overshadow the reality of God's promise. In effect, people actually doubted that God would fulfill God's promises. (This has a parallel in Israel's wilderness journey and turned away from the Promised Land.)

God rested on the Sabbath, not because God needed to rest, but God's rest signaled the completion of creation. This journey of faith had just begun! Because of God's unequivocal love for people, God desires that we rest in God's presence. To be able to rest in God's presence is to experience a foretaste of glory divine. Our entry begins when we believe that God has this relationship for us, and we do not need to try to accomplish this by ourselves.

Where is this rest? For Israel, the promised rest is the Promised Land; for Christians it contains peace with God in the here and now, and also eternal life in God's new creation. We may long for eternal rest, the rest that is available in Christ today. We are to make every effort to appreciate and benefit from what God has already blessed us. This is not a call to gain entry into God's rest by our works, no, it is rather an appreciation of God has blessed us.

We can try, but nothing can be hidden from God. God knows all, including everything that we do, think, or say. Suffice it to say that no one has any secrets from God.

The bottom line is this -- we may think that we are able to outdo God, but that thinking is in error.

**Prayer:**

Give to us, O God, the ability to place our trust in you and finally rest in your promises. Amen.

**Friday, March 19 - Hebrews 4:14-5:4**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Jesus the Great High Priest***

<sup>14</sup> Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

<sup>5</sup> Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup> He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; <sup>3</sup> and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. <sup>4</sup> And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

**Devotion:**

The concept of Priest is not familiar to many people, Baptists in particular. For many, the closest concept of Priest appears in the hymn text of Fanny J. Crosby in her popular hymn Praise Him! Praise Him! This hymn is found in our Celebrating Grace Hymnal, 354. This phrase, "prophet and priest and King!" may be found in stanza 3 at the end of the third line.

In the Old Testament, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple once a year. The elaborate ritual had the High Priest first cleanse himself of his sins and only then was he allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. This happened on Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement), which is celebrated on Wednesday September 15 at sundown and continues until Thursday September 16 at sundown. This was the only day that the sins of Israel were forgiven.

The writer of Hebrews takes great pains in explaining the duties of the Priest, but there was one exception, the human Priest had to offer sacrifices every year on Yom Kippur.

Jesus, our great High Priest, offers his sacrifice not yearly, but once for all time and eternity. This is challenging to our intellect because it appears so easy, and indeed it is.

This portion of our passage completes the author's essay on the superiority of Christ to all the symbols of Jewish worship. The list includes the following: Prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, the priesthood and high priest contained in the Old Testament, the sacrificial system, and the sanctuary. (All but the sanctuary are covered in the first part of the book.)

The writer is laying out a logical case for this new type of religion, a religion that is superior to anything the Jewish people had experienced. Can't you imagine the confusion of the people -- all that they have been taught for their entire life has now changed to a new system. After all, we remember that the first duty of a system is to protect and preserve the system. Period.

Jesus, our great high priest, sympathizes with us. Because he is fully human, he has experienced the same trials and temptations that we have experienced. Because he is fully divine, he did not yield to the temptations that we have experienced. The sole exception is that Christ experienced our earthly temptations, but ***did not sin!***

The wondrous book of Hebrews provides rich teaching for the Hebrews and also for us today. We would do well to read and ponder, to study and meditate upon this important portion of Scripture.

**Prayer:**

Teach us, O God, to trust in your promises freely given to us. Forgive our unbelief. Amen.