



**Daily Devotionals – March 20 to March 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, March 20 - John 12:1-11
by Dr. Charles Qualls
*Mary Anoints Jesus***

1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

9 When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Devotion:

If you're on social media, sooner or later you've seen one of those "Share it when you see it" photos. You know, someone is smiling while taking a selfie in their bedroom. Maybe in their bathroom. But the reflection in the mirror or within the shadows of their open closet contains the subtle image of a creepy face. At first, everything seems normal. Until you see it.

Jesus is in the city for the Passover Festival. There is a nice dinner party going on. Lazarus, newly resurrected by Jesus, is with him at the table. Ostensibly, the party was offered as an opportunity to thank Jesus for giving Lazarus new life. Just as you or I would if someone had done something extraordinary like that.

All looks happy and well. Sure Judas has shown his true colors, as he chastises Mary for her extravagant gift. Jesus has stepped in, though, and defended her. In the process, he has instructed us all. But the narration here in John's gospel tells us that it's actually got a creepy or scary layer to it all -- once you see it. V7 and 10 of today's text should both cause the needle to come screeching across the vinyl record of our nice story. Because they portend bad news ahead.

First, Jesus reckons that Mary has anointed him with the perfume. You anointed someone when they were about to begin a new chapter. You could say that Jesus being betrayed and crucified soon would qualify as a new chapter, right? Jesus is even blunt enough here to say, "She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial." That's a shock to us, right there during a happy moment, even though we know the rest of the story. Then, in v10-11, we get a chilling note that the religious officials had been scoping things out. Looking for an opportunity to kill both Jesus and Lazarus. "So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus."

Once you see it, you can't unsee it. This plot was unfolding, leading him on a collision course with a Cross. Lazarus almost got bumped off, too. This was desperate corruption at its worst. This was the church killing people, all because of Jesus himself.

Prayer:

Lord, there but for your grace go we. Help us not to kill Jesus (or his children) with our words, our ways or our wants. Amen.

Sunday, March 21 - Hebrews 5:5-10

by Dr. Charles Qualls

A High Priest

5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; 6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Devotion:

Jesus came to make possible a deeper relationship between God and people.

With that summary sentence, we are off and running in today's devotion. Today, we are confronted with the notion that perhaps Jesus' ultimate show of human empathy was in dying. He suffered and fulfilled his calling. Along the way, he made possible salvation for those who might follow him. None of that may be news to you.

Consider this: Jesus did what he didn't have to do. Hebrews holds him up as the ultimate "high priest." High priests in Old Testament times were effectively born into the duty by tribe and by

heritage. Once they had risen and been confirmed as high priests, they served in a rotation of sorts. When it was your time to be on duty as such, you went and fulfilled your service. Jesus could have walked away from his duty at any time. But he didn't.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus having been "made perfect." This might mean that Jesus fulfilled his mission. He became the Suffering Servant that Isaiah had spoken of and prophesied so long ago. Exalted in his resurrection, Jesus is pointed up as becoming the eternal high priest. Only Jesus could do this. He has listened, noticed, encouraged, been rejected, healed others and has now sacrificed his life. That is more than we might reasonably expect earthly pastors or priests to do.

V5-6 introduces an interesting dynamic that you'll want to study up a bit in order to more fully appreciate. That is, we get two quotes from royal psalms making the case that Jesus was appointed by God to be a high priest. First in v5, we hear that Jesus is God's Son. Then in v6, he is described as a priest "...forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." That second designation recalls Psalm 110:4, when an obscure king (of Salem) was also identified as a priest of God Most High, for he had blessed Abram (Gen 14:18-20). Read up a little. Though not a figure we are probably familiar with, this was mighty high praise coming from the Hebrews writer!

Prayer:

God of all time, we thank you for the gift of an eternal Jesus. He takes his place as the highest of priests, going far above and beyond a normal calling. May we never take this for granted. Amen.

Monday, March 22 - 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Confidence Through Christ

4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, 6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

7 Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, 8 how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! 10 Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; 11 for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

Devotion:

When have you had to overcome a reputation that might have preceded you? When have you had to speak for yourself when probably your credentials should have already been obvious?

Paul had once lived at Corinth for a year-and-a-half. He worked alongside the people there and planted a church. He nurtured the Corinthian Christians, and since leaving has been a resource to them through letters. He has sent his associates back to check on them as well.

Still, it would appear that there are those among the Corinthians who have jockeyed for power and influence in part by discrediting Paul's missionary movement. Now, as ch3 of this second Corinthian

letter unfolds, Paul is pushing back. He believes he and his group should not need a letter of recommendation, an audition or anyone else to vouch for them.

As our verses today begin, this is the context in which he speaks of “confidence” in a message and in a power.

This is not “magical thinking” that Paul endorses here. He is not plucking Philippians 4:13 right out of its context and waving it around like a talisman for all of life’s hopes, wishes, dreams and difficulties. This is real courage, grounded in the sacred message of a risen Christ. Grounded in the power and leadership of the Holy Spirit. Grounded in the testimony that Paul and his fellow missionaries have built from their own faith experiences.

A new day and a new power has come about because of the “glory” of a risen Christ. It has superseded all previous experience. Greater even than the Mosaic Covenant that led Hebrews for centuries. Now, the Spirit will lead us in following and unleashing the power of Christ risen. We are ministers of a new covenant! Do you believe?

Prayer:

God, lead us into your power. Help us to believe that the Spirit is able to provide and to guide as we serve you boldly. Amen.

Tuesday, March 23 - Psalm 119:9-16

by Dr. Charles Qualls

I Treasure Your Word in My Heart

9 How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

10 With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.

11 I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.

12 Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes.

13 With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth.

14 I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches.

15 I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.

16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Devotion:

Timeless truths are timeless truths. We could look at the first line and think, “Well, once upon a time I was young.”

Then, on second glance we realize that this precept is not just for young hearts, young lives or young believers. The best way any of us could measure or gauge our ways would be to compare them with God’s word. To see what squares up and what doesn’t. I wish I thought that I followed God with my

whole heart, as the psalmist claims. But I know otherwise. I have those moments, those seasons it seems, where the part of my heart that I withhold from God can take over.

What is the key to the pledges the psalmist makes?

We have to know God's word...

...God's voice...

...God's touch...

...and God's spirit when we come in contact with them.

That means we have to work at our faith. We give God access to who we are. We give priority to what God wants over what we want. What God values gets to supersede what we value.

We can do this only if we understand that one lifetime will not be enough for us to "graduate" in the ways of the faith. Instead, we keep on worshipping. We keep on studying. We keep on missioning with other equally called Christians in Jesus' name. Only in those ways do we learn what the psalmist is pledging to learn.

Prayer:

God, keep a hand on our lives. Help us to want to be what you want us to be. Amen.

Wednesday, March 24 - John 12:36-43

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Unbelief of the People

³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light. "After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them. ³⁷ Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

"Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" ³⁹ And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, ⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn -- and I would heal them."

⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. ⁴² Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

Devotion:

This portion of John's Gospel serves as a pivot from the first portion of John, Chapters 1-12, which is known as the Book of Signs, to the Book of Glory, Chapters 13-20. Jesus had concluded his public ministry and now was focusing on the teaching and training of his disciples.

The path forward would become increasingly more difficult for the disciples because Jesus, the Light of the World, is preparing to leave the disciples. In the absence of light, darkness rules supremely.

It is interesting that Jesus departed and hid from them. While the writer does not establish the reasoning behind this action, one has to believe that this is proof that Jesus was human and divine. Perhaps this was how Jesus dealt with rejection. Remember, not everyone who heard his message believed his message. Jesus had come face to face with human rejection. In spite of all the miracles, not everyone believed.

The remaining section (V37-43) discusses the rationale of the soul's privilege to believe or not to believe. While no one except God knows the rationale of unbelief, these verses lay out a possibility -- God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

Perhaps the purpose of this passage is to challenge our thoughts on the following theme -- varying levels of belief. On the one hand, belief without signs is explanatory, while refusing to express one's faith publicly, represents the lowest level.

In today's pandemic reality, the same may be true. Because we mainly stay at home, it is easy to express our faith digitally. But, what will happen when we are able to gather outside of our homes? My prayer is simple, that we will not love human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

Prayer:

Holy God, forgive our inability to give you glory for all that you have done for us. Amen.

Thursday, March 25 - Philippians 2:1-11

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Imitating Christ's Humility

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Devotion:

This well-known and weighty theological passage begs for our attention today. As we approach Holy Week, with all its inherent drama, we need to recall how we can encourage others.

Paul writes that the Philippians will make his joy complete if they continue in the same mind, the same love, and being of one mind. This attitude not only brings honor to God, but also makes Paul's joy complete. Paul is reminding them to keep attuned to his teaching. A portion of Paul's teaching that can be overlooked is humility. Verse 4 "let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. This, of course, is the precursor to verses 5-11 where Paul lays out in great detail

the humility of Christ and how Christ humbled himself even to the point of death -- and that of death on a cross.

The crux of the entire passage is found in verses 6-11 -- everything else flows either to or from this portion of chapter 2. The demands upon the Christian are simple, we must live in a certain manner because we are "in Christ" as the result of all that Christ has done. If you claim Christ as Lord, then you cannot refuse this command. If we refuse this command, we are denying the very Gospel that we claim to live by. Our lives are to share the attitude that was Christ's and now resides in all that belong to Christ.

Christ is described as being in the very form of God and as such, is Lord. We would do well to pay attention to the actions of Christ; his refusal to exploit his rights, his self-emptying, his self-humiliation, and his obedience, even to the point of death upon the cross. These actions reveal the very essence of God -- what God is like in the beginning and even now until the end of time and for all eternity. The exaltation of Christ by God is the vindication of his acts. It is because of Christ's humbleness that he is exalted. Thus, when our behavior is Christ-like, it is also God-like.

In the incarnation, Christ reveals the character, holiness and purposes of God.

What can we learn about God from Christ adopting the form of a slave?

1. The relentless pursuit of us by Christ opens up to us the unimaginable love of God with all its implications.
2. Reconciliation takes place when, by Christ's obedience to the will of God, the relationship between Adam and God is fully restored. Adam's disobedience broke the relationship between Adam and God, and Christ's obedience restores it once again.
3. Those who follow Jesus should not be looking for power or status, but should humbly consider others before themselves.
4. Those who confess that Jesus is Lord and pattern their lives after him can be assured that the final victory belongs to God. (Thanks be to God!)
5. Our lives should be lived in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus -- look at what Jesus did and follow that pattern. Thus, your actions are based on what God has done for you.
6. Christian obedience is a response to God's grace, not a set of rules to follow. If in doubt, our response should imitate Christ. Our community and connections serve as reminders of the grace of God, and thus, how we should live.

Prayer:

Merciful God, please accept our profound thanks for your ministry of incarnation and your love for us. Amen.

Friday, March 26 - Philippians 2:12-18

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Shining as Lights in the World

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without murmuring and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. ¹⁶ It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you -- ¹⁸ and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

Devotion:

This portion completes the second section in one of the Bible's most remarkable chapters. The Apostle continues his writings on humility and Christian service by pointing us to service in world. But before we can take on the assignment, we must, "work out your own salvation in fear and trembling." This phrase has stumped many people over the years, so here is my understanding of the phrase.

To "work out your own salvation in fear and trembling" is quite a task and one not to be taken lightly. In another New Testament book, Ephesians, Paul quite clearly states that no one can earn salvation, regardless of their good works, because salvation is the free gift of God. Because it is the free gift from God, no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). In order for the believer "to work out their own salvation" is to place the primary responsibility upon the individual. The "working" is the work of the Holy Spirit, because the individual must first invite God into their lives and then, and only then, will the Holy Spirit begin its work. The working by the Holy Spirit requires a willing and receptive host, and once the host is found, then the work can begin. The Christian who allows the Holy Spirit to work is indeed a blessed person!

Paul's love and affection for the church is evident for all to see and is a lesson that we could all learn. Jesus tell us that the world will understand that we are Christians by the manner we treat others. To quote the refrain from a popular folk hymn, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love." (They'll Know We are Christians, Celebrating Grace, #272).

By loving others, we rejoice and weep with them; we listen and act for them; we are reacting to their news as if it was our news. Such is the agape love that the Apostle Paul suggests -- always looking out for others. And by acting this way day by day, others will notice that our actions are not the regular actions of the world. Then, we can join Paul and imitate Christ every day!

Prayer:

God of infinite light, as your light shines in our lives, prompt the changes that we need to make to imitate Christ. Amen.