



**Daily Devotionals – March 6 to March 12, 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 6 - Mark 9:2-8
by Dr. Charles Qualls
*The Transfiguration***

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

Devotion:

This is such an important and vivid story. We should heed its riches.

Six days later after what? Why, six days after Jesus had asked that insightful pair of questions on the road to Caesarea Philippi. (Back in Mark ch8) "Who do they say that I am?... Who do YOU say that I am?" You'll remember that Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked his Lord after hearing what all would befall Jesus soon. The Cross was looming just ahead, and none of the disciples wanted to hear about it.

Now, Jesus takes his inner circle up with him onto a mountain. Peter, James and John get there and take in a stunning sight. *The Transfiguration!* You may recall that this word suggests that something is transformed into a higher or more elevated appearance. Often this is a spiritual or sacred connotation when we use the word.

If you feel like this whole scene is calling you back into the Old Testament, it should be. Now we recall Moses going up to join God on Mt. Sinai to receive the tablets. Here now, the disciples saw Jesus' appearance change as Moses' had in God's presence. Speaking of, they also saw ancient Hebrew legends who had died hundreds of years before: Moses and the great prophet Elijah.

Good ole Peter. I probably would have stood there collecting myself, slack-jawed for a moment at least. Peter did the most "Peter" thing ever by jumping up with the idea that they should all just stay there. He even offered to build altars or "dwellings" for all three of the great figures. Our text editorializes in such a human way: Peter said this "for he did not know what to say, so terrified were they."

Instead, a heavenly voice visited them just like it had at Jesus' baptism. "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" We don't always know what to say. Sometimes, like Peter, what we say may not be exactly right. Here's a good takeaway -- we should listen more often than we probably do to Jesus and heed what He says.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to hear your voice rather than our own. We do not know what to say. You always do. Give us spirits that attune our hearts to yours. Amen.

Sunday, March 7 - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Foolishness of the Cross

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Devotion:

One person has said of our text for today, "Paul asserts that the cross, a symbol of humiliation and execution in the ancient Roman world, is actually a symbol of power and wisdom." I get it. Our faith (or any faith for that matter) just looks silly to some people. Actually, to an increasing number of people these days. This is a timely lesson. There is a generational change in likelihood for people to believe and practice a faith of any kind today.

Worldwide, a variety of faiths are losing the younger folks. Some because they don't want any part of organized religion, but do want to practice spirituality at least. They've seen the Church at its worst, and it has turned them off. Others, though, because there is nothing about faith that appeals to them. To some, it's all silly.

The apostle Paul's words to the Corinthian church remind us that this is not a new reaction to Christianity. There were detractors who thought there was a "folly" to the cross even back then. This instrument of execution and punishment spoke of "defeat" if only viewed conventionally. In our current Western minds, we like a winner. We may struggle with the Cross even as Christians, sometimes deep within the privacy of our faith. No wonder others do outside our belief.

Somewhere in the mix, it's good for us to come clean with ourselves about our own doubts, though. If most of us were honest, there are parts of the faith we can find ourselves struggling with. Or, even if content in our faith there are parts of it that still elude our understanding. We believe some things, perhaps, that we simply couldn't put into words if we tried. This lesson might be a good springboard for you to work a bit at your faith this week. Maybe in ways you haven't worked in some time.

Paul sought to change their perspective. By extensions of time and the sacred word, he spoke into our faith, too. If viewed from God's wisdom, the cross actually made all the sense in the world. The trick is -- how might we explain that wisdom and good sense if a friend or family member asked us today?

Prayer:

Lord, help us to see through eyes more like yours. Help us to understand the wisdom of that which could seem foolish. Amen.

Monday, March 8 - 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

by Dr. Charles Qualls

You Are God's Temple

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw -- 13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future -- all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Devotion:

We read this and it sounds nice. At Corinth in the first century, these words exploded into their hearers' ears.

Into a Hellenistic world, where philosophy and classical argument met Jewish traditions, these Believers to whom Paul wrote were haggling. You may recall that some of what this first Corinthian letter regarded were rival factions in the local church. After Paul had lived among them for about a year-and-a-half, he moved on with his mission.

Soon, Apollos and Cephas and maybe even another leader began to vie for the title of pastor. Each of them saw things a little differently. Each of them had differing gifts and styles. Some of the congregation liked it when Apollos led. Another group was happier when Cephas preached. Pretty soon, they were divided. Paul heard about it and addressed the situation here.

What was his message to them that we need to hear?

- His job as church planter was to lay a foundation. Now, they needed to build on what he started. The church was theirs under Jesus Christ.
- Christ is the only solid foundation and the only solid material with which to continue building. If you substitute something false, something cheaper, for Christ then in time that will show up! Not in a good way, of course.
- Theology or doctrine that is as thin as hay will burn up when fire gets near it. Not everything that sounds good, or that imitates Christ, IS of Christ. Beware false prophets.
- They ultimately are each a "temple" in which God is able to dwell. So collectively, they must also tend the church and keep it holy and a place where God may be found, rather than other things that do not belong.

Prayer:

God of our hearts, may we maintain a healthy temple in our souls. This means we will have to work at our faith, and grow it, that we would recognize your voice above all the others that beckon for our souls. Amen.

Tuesday, March 9 - 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Temple Cleansed

1 Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. 2 He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestor David had done.

3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. 4 He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east. 5 He said to them, "Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place. 6 For our ancestors have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the dwelling of the Lord, and turned their backs. 7 They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps, and have not offered incense or made burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. 8 Therefore the wrath of the Lord came upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. 9 Our fathers have fallen by the sword and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. 10 Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may turn away from us. 11 My sons, do not now be negligent, for the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him."

16 The priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and they brought out all the unclean things that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord; and the Levites took them and carried them out to the Wadi Kidron. 17 They began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord; then for eight days they sanctified the house of the Lord, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. 18 Then they went inside to King Hezekiah and said, "We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table for the rows of bread and all its utensils. 19 All the utensils that King Ahaz repudiated during his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and sanctified; see, they are in front of the altar of the Lord."

Devotion:

If you're still with us after a rather long scripture reading, congratulations. I wouldn't include the whole section if I didn't think it important to do so. This is a part of Israel's story we don't often explore.

For most of us, if we were asked to name two kings from ancient Israel, we'd probably say "David and Solomon." Some might remember Saul as the first. That's about where it stops for most. However, if you knew a fourth -- there's a decent chance it'd be Hezekiah. He was known as one of the greatest kings Judah ever had. By the time of his reign, David's united monarchy of Israel had split. Now there was a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern one (Judah).

What you are reading about summarizes what Hezekiah is best remembered for. This righteous and good king saw that the Hebrews were a divided people, and a nation that had fallen largely out of religious touch with her God. He brought reform to the Temple system, convicted that the people should unite again around the worship of Yahweh God. If you want to see the consequences he believes the nation had suffered because of their lax ways, read v5-10 of today's text above. It's pretty stark, isn't it.

Hezekiah didn't stop there. Though quite young when he took the throne, his wisdom protected the nation. Though both kingdoms would eventually fall to outside invaders, Hezekiah held off a monumental attack from Sennacherib. He also commissioned a rather drastic proactive measure, digging through solid rock underground to insure there would be a safe water supply for the city of Jerusalem. The spring-fed system was

vulnerable to sabotage. His crew dug 1,750 feet and connected what is now known as the Siloam Tunnel or “Hezekiah’s Tunnel.”

Here is our scripture’s best endorsement of him, though. These are words we could wish for in summary of our own lives. Verse 2 says, “He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestor David had done.” There it is. I could only aspire for that to be true.

Prayer:

Lord, may we do what is right in your sight. May we live in ways that are faithful to you. Amen.

Wednesday, March 10 - Mark 11:15-19

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹⁵ Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶ and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

¹⁸ And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Devotion:

Reinhold Niebuhr’s quote concerning religion is quite appropriate for this passage. He said that “the worst corruption is a corrupt religion.” Because of the action in today’s passage, it is both historical and current at the same time.

Jesus and his disciples arrived in Jerusalem and entered the temple. Much to Jesus’ surprise, the temple had turned from a place where one could pour oneself out for service to God, world and neighbor into a business model. The temple had been corrupted and servant ministry had been replaced with focus on oneself and not others.

We are reminded by Jesus that the temple was established to serve as a “house of prayer for all nations.” Now the temple was focused inward rather than outward, self-serving rather than outward focus, inclusive rather than self-giving. The people had corrupted the temple and its ministry and the only way to reset the temple was to throw a holy fit in the temple. And, that is exactly what Jesus did by overturning the tables of the money changers.

This account is telling in several ways:

- 1) God is not a God who compromises -- the house of prayer for all people has been corrupted by becoming a den of thieves.
- 2) God’s design is for people to have fellowship with God -- how can this occur when we fail to follow the most basic of God’s commands?
- 3) How can we please this exacting God?

Perhaps, we need to remember the story of a lady who enters a Quaker meeting. She is perplexed when nothing happens with the exception of people sitting around the room, in prayerful silence. She had to ask the person sitting beside her, "When does the service begin?" The person responds, "When we leave."

The outside of Caldwell Chapel at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary has the following engraved on a plaque:

It is not enough to profess.
We have to practice.
It is not enough to talk.
We have to do.
It is not enough to promise.
We have to embody the promise.
It is not enough to say, "Ain't it awful."
We have got to get close enough to get hurt.
(From a sermon by George Dewey Carter)

Prayer:

Forgive us Lord, when our worship is merely lip service. Restore us to your service, we ask through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, March 11 - Ephesians 1:3-6

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Devotion:

In a mere three verses, Paul sets forth the unmerited favor that comes from God the Father. There is much to unpack here, so here are the highlights for me.

Our blessings have their source in God the Father.
Christ applies these blessings to God's people.
God blessings, indeed every spiritual blessing is at our disposal.

God chose us before the foundation of the world to be
holy and blameless before God.
God's agent of choosing us was Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We are adopted as God's children just as God intended.
Our adoption is the fulfillment of God's good pleasure.

The purpose of our adoption is clear -- our adoption is to praise God.
We praise God because of God's glorious grace freely
shared with us through Jesus Christ.

Today we know that the purpose of the writing of Ephesians was to strengthen the belief of the church by explaining the nature and purpose of the body of Christ. This letter addresses the importance of teaching and

how to maintain unity in the church. This is important because Paul wrote these words while a prisoner and because he was unable to visit Ephesus.

This letter is different from many of Paul's letters, especially in the greeting. For this reason, this letter could have been a circular letter -- a letter first sent to Ephesus and then circulated to other neighboring churches.

Many people will focus on the word "destined" in verse 5. I do not chose to believe that we as God's people are merely puppets continually doing God's work and accomplishing God's will. God chose us because this act of God signifies that our salvation is entirely dependent on God's actions. God did not choose us because we are good or worthy of salvation, rather God chose us because God is gracious and freely gives salvation to us.

We cannot take credit for our salvation because to do so would allow room for pride. Salvation, a priceless mystery, originated in the mind of God long before we existed. It is because of Christ that we are holy and blameless before God. God chose us and we belong to God through Jesus Christ. When God looks at us, it is as if we never sinned. When God looks at us, God sees the perfection of Christ and applies that to us.

Our acceptance before God is because we have redemption through the blood of Christ. Jesus died as the final and perfect sacrifice, and as such revealed to us two wonderful spiritual truths -- redemption and forgiveness. Redemption was the price exacted for a slave's freedom. Through Jesus's death, the penalty for our sin was paid, once and for all! The shedding of Jesus' blood reaches back to Leviticus 17:11, which says that forgiveness was only available through the shedding of animal blood.

Thanks be to God for God's provisions afforded to us!

Prayer:

Forgiving God, thank you for choosing us for your kingdom's work. Amen.

Friday, March 12 - Ephesians 1:7-14
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Spiritual Blessings in Christ - Part 2

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Devotion:

We continue with this powerful passage in Ephesians and I will attempt to shed additional light upon it.

We have redemption from sin through Jesus' blood. We also have forgiveness of sin according to the riches of God's grace appointed to us. Again this reminds us that salvation is a generous gift from God and not of ourselves. God's grace is a voluntary and loving favor bestowed upon us. Salvation is not deserved, nor can salvation be earned. Without God's grace, no person can be saved. It is when we acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves that only God can save us.

Many people do not understand God's plan and when the time is right, the entire world will understand God's plan. The purpose of sending Christ into the world was to unite all people, even Jews and Gentiles, into one body with Jesus Christ as the head. On that day, everyone will bow to Jesus Christ as Lord, either because they love him or because they fear his power. (Philippians 2:10-11)

The Holy Spirit is God's seal that indicates that we belong to God. His deposit upon us is a guarantee that God will complete God's work. The Holy Spirit's presence demonstrates the genuineness of our faith, proves that we are God's children and secures eternal life.

Our lives prove God's power at work in us to transform us from our former lives. What we experience now is just a portion or taste of the total change we will undergo in eternity.

All of these actions are to prove the depth of God's love for us, to the praise of God's glory.

Prayer:

Saving God, may our lives live out the words of our lips. May our actions always bring you glory. Amen.