



Daily Devotionals – April 24 to April 30, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

With the April 3 devotion, we concluded our weekly exercise of writing a daily reflection for a year. I hope you'll consider this good news, though. We plan to loop around and continue sending these to you weekly until they are published in book form. We'll keep you posted as we know more about that.

A word about how this will work. Now they will come simply by date with no mention of the day of the week. Remember, these devotions were written for a specific year in time. This means occasionally you may find mention of it being "Easter" even though at a given time the calendar that year may see Easter, Christmas, etc. fall on a different day. If that is the case, then be flexible and just enjoy that special day as it falls within the Devotional. We hope you'll enjoy these as they continue to speak to the year ahead.

Faithfully,

Dr. Charles Qualls, Pastor

April 24 - I Peter 1:13-16 **by Rev. Steven R. Gibson** ***A Call to Holy Living***

13 Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. 14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. 15 Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Devotion:

How do you define holy? Can people achieve the concept of being holy? These questions arise from today's reading in I Peter. But, before we tackle those questions, we must take a brief look at what comes before this passage.

The opening of I Peter consists of a brief greeting and then a lengthy passage detailing praise to God. In this passage, we are reminded of several matters: the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his great mercy has given us hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; we have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and kept in heaven for us; we are being protected by the power of God until the last time when our salvation is ready to be revealed.

This passage contains words that give me goose bumps when I meditate on all the benefits that we have received from God -- not only eternal life, but an inheritance!

Therefore (because of verses 3-12) we find ourselves in a place to be called God's Holy people. As God's people, we are admonished to be ready for action, to discipline ourselves for what is to come. Our state of readiness is based on the hope and grace that are to be revealed when Jesus Christ is revealed. Because of the merits of Jesus Christ, because he is holy, we are also called to be holy.

I, for one, am not holy. If you are like me, you struggle daily to become more Christ-like and to become less self-centered. As Paul would say, more of Christ, less of me. Of course, this is much easier to write about than to put into practice. The burning question is how do we become holy?

Peter indicates that the first action in becoming holy is to “prepare your minds for action”, which some theologians would suggest the following to “gird the loins of your understanding, and being sober, set your hope entirely on the grace to be given you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” For people in the 1st century, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ was something that they fully expected in their lifetimes. People who are sober, people who are ready for action are called to live in hope.

“Be holy” indicates that the former life, the former desires are left behind. In addition to leaving our former life behind, we are to embrace the possibilities of the new life.

The point is this -- to compare the One who calls Christians to the One Holy God. God, who is holy, desires a people for God who are holy. God, who is our only hope, desires a people who are hopeful.

We serve a Holy God and God expects us to be Holy. One other thought is this -- that as God’s children we have not become all that God has asked us to become. Rather we are “children of obedience” and hopefully, growing each day, conforming to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, support us as we continue in our journey to become holy. Amen.

April 25 - Isaiah 25:6-9

by Dr. Charles Qualls

We Have Waited for God

6 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. 7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. 9 It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Devotion:

Okay. So granted it may not have been “...a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.”

Actually, if you must know the truth it was the “Hot Now” sign at a Krispy Kreme donut shop that prompted our celebration. It was May of 1995 and my family had spent an anxious day at St. Joseph Hospital. My dad had been found to have cancer, and the only question was how advanced, spread and deadly it might be.

The surgeon finally came out and was as optimistic as any cancer doctor will be while delivering news that is “pending full pathology report.” The cancer appeared to be fairly localized. He would live, and could return home after a few nights in the hospital. Late that night, we carpoled back to my hometown and on Highway 9 headed north -- that’s where the red neon sign beckoned us in. With little half-pint cartons of milk and fresh donuts right off the icing belt, we ushered in the transition as our anxiety melted right into sweet relief.

Somehow, faith seemed fresh again. Somehow, we also felt accompanied by a God who might not have spoken aloud from the heavens. But instead who had shown up in the form of an experienced doctor telling us what the art of medicine had just told him.

Surely, all we who are reading these words have known a similar wait for God. Some of us came to faith more easily. Others have come to and engaged their faith more cynically or with questions. Some of us tend to live life more easily, others with greater difficulty. There are optimists. Pessimists. Laid-back and high-strung.

All of us have waited upon God. The wait comes in the dark night of the soul, or in the season of indecision. We wait during the uneasy days of a pandemic, and in the quiet of the hospital room. In between jobs, in grief, in fear of newness and in the energy of positive change we can all find ourselves listening for God to speak into our lives.

Our text in Isaiah began with a description of a grand feast. Soon, we discover that the feast is not the destination. Relief, hope and optimism seem to be where Isaiah has arrived after a time spent in some other, less certain land.

Can you read this and not hear John's Revelation from the New Testament? *8 He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. We will hear these same promises again, as the very pages of our Bible close out.*

Sometimes, you just know that God has shown up. We may await God even in these days of quarantine, illness and loss. We may listen and watch. When God does come near, I pray that we have eyes to see and ears with which to hear. God's nearness is sweet to taste. God's victory is worthy of celebrating.

Prayer:

Lord of our waiting hearts, be near to us. May our spirits be sustained by hope in you, even as life gives us little that would settle us. Help us to do our parts by straining out the noise that would make hearing you difficult. Amen.

April 26 - Luke 24:13-35
by Dr. Charles Qualls
The Walk to Emmaus

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."

So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Devotion:

What a long walk that must have been. Oh, measured conventionally the Emmaus Road journey was probably only seven miles. I'd far rather drive it than walk the distance. But it'd be like walking from Franklin to Sedley. You could do it, and they did regularly.

Here's the problem. When your heart is that heavy, the slightest task is overwhelming. Unless you are numb, grief can feel an awful lot like fear or even pain. It can also feel like anxiety and overwhelm. I think these two walking the Emmaus Road must have had feet that felt weighted down. Every step was at best difficult, and at worst a distracted exercise in frustration.

You can be in someone's presence for a while and not pay a whole lot of attention to them. We should have tender hearts when it comes to the moment they are joined by a third traveler. We readers who have heard this story before want to step out in front of the pair. We want to point to the third and say, "Wake Up! That's Jesus walking with you. Don't you see him?"

No. No they didn't. Not really. Add in v16 where it mentions that "*their eyes were kept from recognizing him*" and this thing doesn't even seem fair. They were recounting the events of the week. The day of Jesus' death and burial. Their Lord who had lived and breathed right there among them was now gone. Dead. Then, the only thing that could make things worse might depend on the version of the story they had heard. What they seemed to know was that the Tomb had been opened and his body was missing.

We can tell how oblivious they are to this stranger's identity. To the one who has joined them on the road, they throw some obvious shade his way by asking, "Are you the only person who hasn't heard what happened in Jerusalem?" Then, they recount the whole thing to him. They've got nothing but time as they shuffle along.

One of the very saddest verses in all of scripture, in my opinion, happens here. You can hear the resignation. The crushing sadness. The defeat they feel is palpable in v21 with the words, "*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*" If you've even one time felt like everything you had believed was now gone -- now irrelevant or false -- that sounds like what has happened to these two.

V25 shows Jesus being Jesus. Actually, you might be taken aback a bit here. Because Jesus isn't so pastoral with these two. Not gentle at all, but instead almost confrontational. "*Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?*" 27 *Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

Still, nothing. They don't recognize him. I doubt I would have either, since no one was expecting to see him there. That is, they don't recognize him until he sits down with them at home. Blesses the bread and breaks it. Instantly, their eyes are opened and they understand whom they have been journeying with.

Jesus journeys with you. Jesus journeys with me, and sometimes I don't have eyes that will see nor ears that will hear him. Not in a way that I recognize him at least. In these days of sadness and isolation, but also of hope and creativity -- our challenge is to watch for the Christ in our world. Occasionally, even to BE the Christ in our world. Are you paying attention?

Prayer:

Lord of our hopeless days and Lord of our greatest joy. Come and walk with us some more. Be with us and be patient, Lord Jesus, as you are near to us. Speak, and we will try to give you open ears and open hearts. Amen.

April 27 - 1 Peter 1:23-25

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Word of the Lord Endures Forever

23 You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever.” That word is the good news that was announced to you.

Devotion:

I don't know about you. But for many people, times like these test scriptural texts like this one. We puff out our chests in the good times and speak of a faith that sounds downright bullet-proof. Absolute. Nothing can penetrate the power and protection offered by our God. We will stick with God to the very end! That's the way it feels in good times.

“Scraaaaatch...!” When life suddenly causes the needle to drag across the record, our faith may take a hit. What makes you feel vulnerable or down in the spirit may differ from what it takes to ding up my faith.

- The death of a loved one.
- A threatening illness in your immediate family.
- A crash in the stock market.
- The loss of a job.
- A family situation where things get ugly and permanent damage may have been done.
- A friend hurts you deeply or betrays you.

When a seismic happening affects our lives, we are never left quite the same. That could be something positive or negative. We are never put back quite like we were, or left in just the same place as we were. We are “born anew” not only by things spiritual, but also by life on occasions.

Here is what Jesus was getting at in his teaching with a parable or two: good seed getting planted in various settings and yielding permanent results in fertile soil. Or, in 1 Peter we even hear about the spirit of God implanting into our lives “imperishable” seed. The things of Jesus. Things that can stand up to the best and worst that life has to offer. Real faith, grounded in the real Christ, can last. Shallow faith in a god made to reflect our own image, can't put down lasting roots. “*All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever.*”

So much in our lives truly can be taken away from us. We are more vulnerable in so many ways than we care to admit. People and things that matter can vanish. Job's story in the Bible reminds us of that. Even that prolific sufferer, Job, ends having drawn the conclusion that the things of God endure and given time, will even renew life within us.

Prayer:

God of our days and God of our things, help us to weigh and measure carefully. To be honest about that which may be important to us, but temporary still. May we also have the wisdom to recognize your presence in our lives instead. Only you can sustain us eternally. Amen.

April 28 - John 21:1-14**by Dr. Charles Qualls*****Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples***

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 6 He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Devotion:

"After WHAT things?" My Sunday School class knows that if a scripture text starts with words like this one does today, that will be my first reaction. If we want the context for a story like the one we study now, we have to go backwards first. That's the direction our scripture text is pointing us in as it begins, "After these things..."

As chapter 20 ended, Jesus had just appeared to his disciples in a locked room. He had offered Thomas a chance to touch his scars, if that was what Thomas needed in order to believe. Thomas had made his beautiful confession that we looked at in a previous devotional. "My Lord, and my God!"

A friend of mine once observed that a lot of Jesus' disciples had been fishermen before he invited them to follow him. They had gone. Now in these days after his death, it would appear that they never got rid of the keys to their boats. Having emerged from the isolation of their hiding, they had gone right back to what they knew. What they were comfortable doing. They fished. Well, at least they were trying to fish.

It is poignant that Jesus has come to meet them, and once again he has done so where they are. Jesus does that. We love to say that Jesus meets you where you are. But notice that Jesus also never leaves us where he finds us. After some guidance about their fishing, he invites them ashore for a bite of breakfast. If they were out fishing so early, where had the fish come from that Jesus already had cooking on the charcoal fire? Ahhhh....mysteries.

Here is what I love to watch. After breakfast, Jesus took Peter for a walk. Peter, who had been in his inner-circle of disciples. One of the big three. Now, we get a three-fold interrogation of Peter: "Do you love me?"

Three times, Peter responds by attesting his love. Some wonder if this is not a symbolic opportunity for Peter to repent and to reaffirm his love and dedication. Exactly proportionate to the three times he had just denied Jesus shortly beforehand.

Be sure to read how the story ends. Verses 18-24 are packed with meaning. We are probably downright uncomfortable with Jesus' prediction of Peter's own coming death. Even more, though, this disciple has work to do in the meantime. He will indeed redeem himself, becoming the chief apostle. Eventually being the one who was considered to be the "father" of the early church. In Jesus' absence, it was in fact Peter to whom the others turned for guidance, strength and direction. "If you love me, feed my sheep."

Prayer:

God of grace and forgiveness, we thank you that you love us so. Lead us to walk with you, discovering newness for our lives. Speak unto us, and may we listen to your call. Then, with the days we have left, may we do what you ask of us. Amen.

April 29 - Psalm 134

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Praise in the Night - A Song of Ascents

1 Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! 2 Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the Lord. 3 May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.

Devotion:

Like many of you, I've heard many times over our quarantine the hope and dream of returning to church to worship. The question remains -- when can we return? I love the Facebook Live services because we can see the Sanctuary in all its beauty, hear the sounds of the organ, and see the beautiful stained glass window. That is the best that we can do at the present, but it is no comparison to worshipping in the Sanctuary.

This Psalm occurs in a timely place in the lectionary because it features the pilgrims on their way to or just after their arrival at Jerusalem. The Psalm opens with an invitation to the gathered congregation to do what they had come to do: Praise the Lord. Let us take a brief look at this small but impactful Psalm.

Notice the admonition to "bless the Lord" appears twice, in both verse one and verse two. I am drawn to verse three because that is the verse that articulates the unfathomable -- that the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth blesses us from Zion. This is baffling to think that the creator of the world blesses us!

It is expected that we would kneel to bless God -- it wholly unexpected that God would kneel to bless us. For God to do this, God would voluntarily take on the role of a servant and as such the sins of God's people. This is the ultimate role reversal and demonstrates the depth of God's love for us, even to the point of vulnerability. But there is another aspect to consider -- blessings for God's people results in suffering for God.

The connection between God and God's people is a story long on forgiveness and steadfast love. This relationship reveals the divine character of God that such love would be offered to a sinful people. This love is our only hope, a hope that fully expresses itself in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Surely these thoughts will be paramount in our minds when we can safely gather and worship God in spirit and in truth.

Prayer:

Holy God, make us mindful to not only bless you, but also to receive your blessing. Empower your people to continually look to you, our blessed Hope. Amen.

April 30 - 1 Peter 2:9-12
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
God's Chosen People

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Live as Servants of God. 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. 12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

Devotion:

Have you ever considered the implications of the word "chosen"? This reminds us that words matter, that we should choose our words wisely and that we should remain true to our word. The truth is that people hear and react to the story in different ways. Some people might hear the story and react to it as God's narrative of showing mercy to those who knew no mercy. As a result of showing mercy, these "chosen" ones find a sense of belonging and identity. Others may hear the same story and find it without merit. They would probably dispute what the writers describe -- they do not hear the story in faith. So it is with us today, some people may relate to and find comfort in God, while others find no such comfort.

The question upon our minds is not how others respond to God, but how we respond to God. The purpose of this passage is to remind us of our identity -- we are Christians, the Christian family is our family. When this passage speaks of race, it make no mention of any ethnic group, instead race speaks of our relationship to Christ.

As Christians, we are called to live without malice, without guile, without insincerity, without slander and without envy. This passage also reminds us that once we were not a people, but now are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. (Verse 10)

The plea to live as servants of God rings throughout the ages and still rings true today. How does one live as a servant of God during this season of Covid-19? How can we minister during a season of quarantine? Does God have the same expectations of us in this uncertain time?

As people of God and of Franklin Baptist, you already know the answer to the questions asked above -- they are on the one hand simple and on the other hand complex. The short answer is this -- Love God and Love others. By loving God and others, we fulfill the new commandment of Jesus found in John 13:34: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Prayer:

Loving God, assist us to always love first and foremost, just as Jesus loved. By loving others, we show forth your love, available to all. Amen.