



Daily Devotionals – June 19 to June 25, 2021

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

June 19 - Genesis 35:1-4
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Jacob Returns to Bethel

35 God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.” 2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes; 3 then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.” 4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem.

Devotion:

Today’s lesson continues the Biblical Narrative in the journeys of Jacob. The scene begins with God telling Jacob to go to Bethel, settle there, and make an altar there. But before they could begin their journey, his family had certain provisions that needed to occur: put away all foreign gods; purify yourselves; and change your clothes. God’s instructions were important and needed to be followed before the journey could safely begin.

Let’s review the backstory to today’s lesson. Jacob, along with Abraham and Isaac, were among the most significant people in what we call the Old Testament. This basis was based on the character of God -- not their character. These men were not perfect, in fact they were far from perfect, just like us, trying to praise God, but often failing miserably.

Jacob is the third link in God’s plan to have Abraham become the father of nations. In fact, God promised before Jacob’s birth that God’s plan would be carried out through Jacob and not his twin brother Esau. From Jacob’s life we are able to see God’s works, even though Jacob’s methods were not always respectable.

We can divide Jacob’s life into four stages with each stage being marked by an encounter with God. The first stage Jacob’s actions reflect the meaning of his name -- he grasps the heel or he deceives. It was Jacob that grabbed Esau’s heel at birth and eventually grabbed Esau’s blessing for himself, though Jacob fled for his life. The second stage of Jacob’s life is characterized by Laban’s manipulation and deceit. The third stage returned to a new role as grabber -- he grabbed on to God and would not let go. His name was changed to Israel because he struggles with God. The fourth stage of Jacob’s life was to be grabbed by God. This stage was characterized by Jacob unwilling to make a move without God’s approval.

In the final analysis, Jacob’s strengths were: father of the twelve tribes of Israel, third in the Abrahamic line of God’s plan, worked hard and longed to achieve what he wanted, and was a good businessman. But his failures are catastrophic! When conflict comes, he relied on his ability rather than going to God for help and he tended to accumulate wealth for wealth’s sake.

The following lessons can be learned from Jacob: Security does not belong in the accumulation of goods; and all our actions (and intentions) are woven by God into God’s plan. With this brief backstory, today’s lesson will become clearer.

Chapter 35 begins with God speaking to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." God took the initiative in speaking to Jacob and reminded him of his past dealing with his brother Esau. By reminding Jacob of this painful past, God captured Jacob's attention quickly. But catching Jacob's attention was only the beginning! God's message to Jacob required that certain provisions were to be made: Put away foreign gods, purify yourselves, change your clothes and then travel to Bethel and make an altar there. Remember that Bethel was the place that Jacob slept and had his famous dream often referred to as Jacob's Ladder. (You may remember a children's song with that title.) So Jacob builds two altars at Bethel -- one while running from Esau (and from God) and one in obedience to God.

Before they could worship, the community had to put away false gods, crooked speech, violence, oppression, wrath, malice, slander and abusive language. The action of putting away false gods would be known today as renouncing sinfulness and all the works of the devil.

The changing of one's clothes symbolizes moving from the old to the new. The washing of clothes symbolizes removing the defilement that we all have. But, because of God's mighty actions we are clothed with the garments of salvation. (Isaiah 61:10)

What does this passage teach us during Covid-19 and civil unrest?

- 1) Just like Jacob, we will not always please God.
- 2) Just like Jacob, we can offer the prayer of repentance for our actions and attitudes.
- 3) Just like Jacob, we can revisit places in our past that have caused us and others pain.
- 4) Just like Jacob, we can experience God's forgiveness.
- 5) Just like Jacob, we can experience God's faithfulness throughout our lives.
- 6) Just like Jacob, our rebellious hearts can be changed to a heart that seeks to honor God.
- 7) Just like Jacob, we can use our gifts and abilities to honor God.

Prayer:

Faithful God, you have loved us despite our failures and frailties. Forgive our sins and restore to us the joy of our salvation, that we might love and serve you all of our days. Amen.

June 20 - Psalm 86:1-10

by Dr. Charles Qualls

I Put My Trust In You

1 Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. 2 Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; 3 have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to you all day long.

4 Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you. 5 You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you. 6 Hear my prayer, Lord; listen to my cry for mercy.

7 When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me. 8 Among the gods there is none like you, Lord; no deeds can compare with yours.

9 All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name. 10 For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

Devotion:

If you got in a hurry and didn't read the Psalm 86 scripture just now, let me encourage you to go back and read it first. Don't worry. We'll wait on you. This will make so much more sense if you do.

Attributed to king David, these words fascinate if we consider one as powerful and wealthy as a king confessing to poverty and need. (v1) Let that wash over you. This psalmist has a deep spiritual need that can only be met by God. In fact, in v2 this sense of vulnerability becomes more evident as he also wants to be "protected" by his God. What king was ever lacking for protection? One who is no doubt called "Lord" by those subservient to him now confesses the Divine as his God.

This is a psalm written by one who is in trouble. But let's look first at what seems not to be the cause of trouble. There is no indication that the writer suffers a physical or medical ailment. Likewise, this psalmist seems at the moment not to feel as though he is in trouble with God. The writer has a clean conscience, on balance.

"...for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; 3 have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to you all day long."

The trouble this writer suffers seems to come from sources that originate beyond his control. Invaders from other lands, or perhaps an uprising from within, threatens this one and his personal sense of safety. Israel constantly had enemies and skirmishes. Battle was where David had proven himself, and unfortunately would be a staple of his reign.

You and I have trouble in life that threatens from without and within. Yes, admittedly with time and distance we can trace choices we made at the root of some problems we have. But other issues can sneak up and take us on from the outside. Who would have chosen a global pandemic and its resulting issues for us this year? No one. Who would have chosen the tragic accident or the terminal medical diagnosis they or their loved one received? No one.

The psalmist speaks and we should listen. He calls upon God all day long. He senses that God listens. He trusts in God. In all his trouble, still he has not forgotten what God has done that proves that our Lord is trustworthy. In a what-have-you-done-for-me-lately world, this psalmist remembers evidence of God's power. He will trust and be faithful.

Prayer:

Lord of our lives, may we have a similar trust. May we sample life and find you worthy, just as the psalmist has. We believe. Help thou our unbelief. Amen.

June 21 - Romans 6:1b-11**by Dr. Charles Qualls*****Should We Sin More?***

1b Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

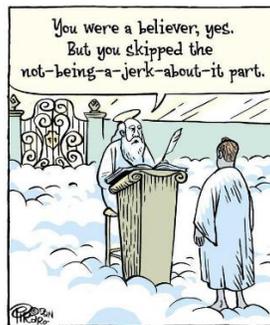
7 For whoever has died is freed from sin. 8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Devotion:

There are some people whose faith enculturation makes them (in my view) a little silly for Jesus. You know. Maybe a little gung-ho with all the “god-talk.” Or wearing t-shirts with over-the-top Christian messages. Some of Paul’s phrases here could sound a little that way to me. Like “Dead to sin... alive in Christ,” probably because over the years some of our more charismatic or evangelical friends have hijacked the language of faith and gotten a little carried away.

Make no mistake, though. This teaching from the apostle Paul is about mature -- not silly -- faith. There are other ways to be a “silly Christian,” you know. Being a mean-spirited Christian, for instance, is just as silly as sitting in the end-zone of a nationally televised football game and blocking everyone’s view with a big John 3:16 sign. Telling everyone how much of a believer you are, and then living in ways that are contradictory to the life and message of Christ, is silly.

I have told you in a sermon about a favorite cartoon I love. In fact, here it is --



You want to know what the apostle Paul thought was silliest of all? Christians who lived as though what they believed had no bearing on their conduct. In today’s scripture, he is waxing philosophic but also making an important point. If Christ’s grace is at its greatest when forgiving, then should we just sin all the more so that Christ’s grace will be even greater? Of course not, we would quickly agree.

Though we are free from sin because of salvation in Christ’s grace, we can continue to live as captives to sin. That is what Paul points out to the Roman believers. We would never have been “free” under the Law. Grace does something for us that the Law never could. It is possible that we can be transformed by Christ’s grace in ways that striving to keep a legalistic checklist never could. We were doomed to fail under the Law. No one could possibly keep it. We were captives to sin. Under grace, we have the guidance of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives instead.

So if by grace we are forgiven, should we sin so that grace abounds all the more? That is an understandable question. That is also a question which arises, I think, from a mindset that had once been steeped in keeping the Law. In what ways does your understanding of grace still suffer from our human tendencies toward legalism? How can grace “free” us to find -- and give -- true life in Christ?

Prayer:

Lord of the Internet, Lord of our words and deeds, help us to grow each day. Help us to understand that what we believe really only matters if what we say to each other -- and on Facebook -- and what we actually do...matches up with it. Amen.

June 22 - Psalm 86:11-17

by Dr. Charles Qualls

You Have Helped Me and Comforted Me

11 Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

12 I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. 13 For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead.

14 Arrogant foes are attacking me, O God; ruthless people are trying to kill me -- they have no regard for you. 15 But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

16 Turn to me and have mercy on me; show your strength in behalf of your servant; save me, because I serve you just as my mother did. 17 Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Devotion:

Aren't the people and things that challenge your life always "arrogant foes"? No matter how much our sacred texts instruct me to love even my enemies -- to pray for them -- I struggle with that. You may also. The Psalms are a far more comfortable home for my heart on this sort of thing. Sometimes, the psalmists will ask God to punish, assail or even kill their enemies.

I try not to go quite that far ever since that one time... I won't mention just now. Anyway, I also sympathize with everything in verse 14, including the conclusion that the psalmist draws. These enemies of his are so useless, they don't even like God! These enemies probably don't like good BBQ. We even view things like disease and destructive acts of nature as arrogant foes who surely don't like God, their Mama's home cooking or ACC football.

Whoever wrote this is facing a season of difficulty. We explored an earlier portion of Psalm 86 in another devotional setting. Verse 14 is surrounded, however, with the parts of the psalm that I commend to you today. Look at the requests. In fact, you might take a minute and count how many individual requests the psalmist makes of God in this time of challenge. Most of them are downright commendable.

While some of us pray for delivery, this psalmist prays for instruction (v11) and focus (also v11). While some of us would beg for a miracle, this psalmist asks God to essentially remain the same (v15). While some of us would ask that vengeance be ours, the psalmist asks for God's mercy and signs of strength instead (v16).

Even the v17 request for a "sign of your goodness" is a healthy, reasonable request. Granted, the psalmist still has in mind putting his enemies to shame. However, in a time of trouble, asking the Lord to help us remember times when God has been good is helpful. That is the kind of spiritual memory and perspective that lets us feel accompanied by God rather than abandoned.

Prayer:

God of our bold seasons and Lord of our fearful ones, we pray to you on this day. Give us hearts that trust. Remind us that even if we suffer, you give to us far more than life can take away. Amen.

June 23 - Revelation 2:1-7

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Message to Ephesus

1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

Devotion:

- *“Oooo....cool. Something from Revelation! Now we’re talking.”*
- *“Revelation. I’ve never really understood Revelation. It’s weird.”*
- *“My goodness. We’re in a pandemic and some of us are still quarantining. Could you just do some light, fluffy stuff and be uplifting already!?”*
- *“Well, there’s always variety. Let’s see what he makes of this.”*

Okay. Now that I’ve captured at least some of your reactions to today’s scripture text, let’s see what indeed I do make of it. I’m just as interested as you are to see. No, actually I think there’s a compelling message here.

John’s “Revelation” was a letter distributed originally to seven churches in Asia. They were among the most prominent and hopeful within the fledgling Christian movement by the time John was exiled on the island of Patmos. As I have mentioned before, the Revelation was written in a specific literary style, *Apocalypticism*. There are portions of the Old Testament books Joel and Daniel, for instance, that also have some Apocalyptic sections. The seven “lampstands” are believed to represent these seven churches. It was quicker to refer to seven lampstands than to have to name them all. Plus, the code words made this message appear to be simply harmless drivel to those who might have censored it.

Among the seven churches was the one at Ephesus. John is believed to have kept a home at Ephesus. Tradition has it that he even took Mary, our Lord’s mother, to live there. John has many good things to say about the church at Ephesus. Among their good qualities, they have had some wisdom about them. Here they are:

- I know your works, your toil
- your patient endurance
- I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers.
- You have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false.
- I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary.

Aren’t these genuine, admirable qualities in a church? They are actually hallmarks of a mature faith, all gathered up in one congregation. Any pastor would want to serve with a church like that. They even know enough about the faith that they are not easily snookered by every loud-talking, Jesus-obsessed dynamic personality who walks into their midst. I like these people!

But all is not well. John gives them a low mark in one crucial category:

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Individuals and churches can lose their original focus. Their vision and passion. They can get comfortable. They can fall flat. The apostle Paul said it a different way:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Prayer:

God of our faith, through the seasons of our lives may you kindle in us a love for you. Nudge us that we might keep our usefulness to you. Speak to us that we would not lose our place in your kingdom. Amen.

June 24 - Matthew 10:5-23
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
The Mission of the Twelve

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. 9 Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, 10 no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. 11 Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. 12 As you enter the house, greet it. 13 If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. 15 Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Coming Persecutions

16 "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. 19 When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; 20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 21 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; 22 and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 23 When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Devotion:

Joana Adams tells of a story of a woman who attended church conferences faithfully year after year. When asked about her regular attendance, she explained that she had been in attendance as a young girl when the preacher was handed a note as he was preparing to preach. The message was the announcement that World War II had ended. Ever since that experience, she had attended the gatherings hoping for news as good as that.

Today, in the midst of Covid-19, we all seek good news. And we have good news in verse 7, "As you go, proclaim the good news. 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'" This sounds so easy, so simple, but in verse 14, the reality of ministry comes home. The fact is that some will not respond to your message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

On one hand, to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near is simple, but yet God's unconditional love can get lost in church business and polity. Often the very people that should rejoice remain marginalized. Why should people expect a change when they cannot see change?

Matthew shares that the twelve should carry on the ministry of Jesus by doing what Jesus did "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Verse 8) Before we can breathe, Matthew continues his challenge to us that we must view the world through the lens of the kingdom of God, and not our personal lens. God's kingdom is beyond our comprehension, God's kingdom is a place of healing and a place of trust. In the kingdom of God, all are welcomed as fellow citizens, beloved children of God!

Catherine of Genoa, in 1473, had a powerful experience of God's love for her. I quote from her experience:

As for heaven, I guess you've noticed, God put no doors there. No, God didn't. And don't you wonder why? It's because whoever wants to enter heaven, does. That's how God's love works. All merciful, standing there with (God's) arms wide open. God's waiting -- this very moment -- to embrace us and take us into (God's) splendid beauty and kindness.

This is the Good News that we share. This is the Good News that people long to hear. This is news too good to keep to ourselves!

The next section shares some of the challenges that we face. We will find ourselves in a variety of situations and we should not be surprised if we are persecuted. Often people have their personal litmus test for orthodoxy, which may or may not agree with our orthodoxy. The truth is that some people will receive the good news joyfully while others will not.

Henri Nouwen, a popular author and a Roman Catholic priest, describes every Christian as a *wounded healer*. What he is essentially saying is this: People will attempt to dismiss what God is saying to them through you. It is precisely when you believe that you have arrived spiritually, that you are in the most spiritual danger.

What can we learn from this passage?

We have a tremendous opportunity that God has placed in our hands -- to share God's love to a world that needs God's love so desperately.

We will have obstacles in our way.

We will be wounded in our journey.

As Christ followers, our race is not a sprint, but a marathon.

We need to rely on God's Spirit to direct our paths and our speech.

The one who endures to the end will be saved. (see V22b)

Prayer:

Preserve us O God, that we may be your faithful witness even in difficult times. Use us, we pray, to be an encouragement to others throughout our journey, we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

June 25 - Micah 7:18-20
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
God's Compassion and Steadfast Love

18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency. 19 He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. 20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

Devotion:

The book of Micah is often remembered for two passages: The prophecy of peace when one day the nations shall "beat their swords into plowshares: (Micah 4:3) and the requirements of God (Micah 6: 6-8). One other notable section is the prophecy that a new ruler will come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Despite its brevity, Daniel J. Simundson writes that Micah presents the complex manner in which God relates to humanity -- sometimes God is angry and destructive, while other times God acts in an abundance of compassion. Perhaps the best news from the Prophet is hope, even in a world that is hopeless. Micah proves that a message of hope can be honest, realistic and able to revive the spirit of the person whose spirit has been crushed. Although a brief book, Micah has much to say to us today.

Our passage ends the book and recapitulates the themes that Micah discusses. Throughout Micah, the themes of justice and mercy appear to be in conflict. God is depicted as a God that pardons iniquity and passes over the transgression (v18). How can God be the God that cannot tolerate sin, yet constantly show compassion to his people? Throughout Micah, the tension between justice and mercy is apparent. In our passage, we have a mixture of judgement and hope, but hope prevails!

The bottom line is that Micah views God as a merciful and forgiving God. To be sure, God is not pleased with the injustice done to the weak and powerless, especially in the name of religion. But, thanks be to God, that God's true nature once again is shown. As verse 20 states, God's unfailing love is shown to Jacob, Abraham and their ancestors, even from the olden days. If we face the unknown future with God, hope is always possible!

Because we face the future with God on our side, we can do so with confidence. With the challenges that face our world today, we certainly need God on our side. Today turbulence and unrest continue in our nation. Today a lack of respect for other people is prevalent. Today's news often incites violence rather than to edify. So, what are we to do?

First, we must remember that all people are children of God, and as such we have many brothers and sisters in God's family. Because people make up God's family and all people have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, we should not be surprised when tempers flare. God sent Christ into the world to seek and save sinners.

Second, even the most mature Christian has times when their actions are anything but Christian. Most of us have a breaking point and when we approach that breaking point we must be extra careful. When we approach that breaking point, we would do well to count to 10 slowly to allow a little steam to escape.

Third, the Golden Rule still applies -- we should treat others in the same manner that we wish to be treated. Extend kindness to others, no matter what!

Fourth, we need to remember that Christ walks with us every day.

Fifth, we would do well to look at the situation through God's eyes and not our eyes.

Persecution is not right. Violence is not right. Destruction of other's property is not right. But God calls us to a higher standard -- to be peacemakers. May it be so, Lord, may it be so.

Prayer:

God, your direction is sorely needed today. Help us to find your still small voice and then to listen to your voice. Amen.