



Daily Devotionals – June 26 to July 2, 2021

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

June 26 - Luke 17:1-4
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Some Sayings of Jesus

17 Jesus said to his disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! 2 It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. 4 And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive."

Devotion:

This brief passage brings new information to the life of Christian discipleship. At first reading, harsh words jump out from the page, but good news can be found if we dig deeper.

These words are addressed to Jesus' disciples and they convey the requirements of being a faithful disciple.

First, Jesus acknowledges that his disciples will stumble as we travel along the road of faith – we are not perfect! This standard is tempered by acknowledging the frailty of humans, yet combines that with the availability of abundant grace.

Second, we are reminded that we are mutually responsible for each other, especially for those who see themselves as having little or no value. It is always our responsibility to assist others, even when they do not have the means to repay.

Then we approach the verses concerning forgiveness. Verses 3 and 4 make forgiveness a defining standard for the Christian community. Just in case you missed it, this passage does not condone "cheap grace"; rather it sets forth accountability on both sides of the forgiveness equation. The community maintains its standard of acceptable behavior by rebuking those who breach the community standard. Thus to name the sin and call the sinner to account is a vital part of the Christian community. On the flip side, there is the expectation of a repentant sinner. We all know the power of forgiveness and pray for the offender.

Maybe Jesus was looking deeper than an individual sin. Perhaps Jesus' call for naming sins and seeking repentance was to name the sins that divide us. Offering unlimited forgiveness is both powerful and pastoral in today's society.

The only way that we can both practice discipleship and forgiveness is to admit our need for abundant faith. Beverly Zink-Sawyer states it this way: "All of this is a tall order for frail, imperfect beings like us, but God in Christ has shown us what it means to do as God commands: To live responsibly, to forgive generously, to believe trustingly and to follow obediently. Therein we find the true blessings of life with God for ourselves and for the community of God's people."

Prayer:

Loving and faithful God, help us to love and forgive as you have loved and forgiven us. Amen.

June 27 - Psalm 13
by Dr. Charles Qualls
How Long, O Lord?

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

3 Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, 4 and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

5 But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Devotion:

"When are we going to start having 'Church' again?"

"How long is this pandemic going to go on...and on?"

"Why can't we just get on with our lives now?"

These are the questions of life interrupted. They are most understandable, too. We continue in the grasp of a global pandemic. By now, our current cultural climate has done what it does worst -- it has divided and politicized even an illness. There are those who believe that the prudence of sheltering-in-place has saved lives and should go on as long as necessary. Others believe that it is a fearful overreaction whose economic costs have outweighed the benefits.

Have you ever felt like you had been forgotten? I think we all have. Sometimes, it is by a person. Other times by our God. The psalmist is at his wit's end. He feels "forgotten" (v1) by his own God. Again, this psalm is attributed to David like others we've read in these weeks. If we assume that is accurate, then our scriptures give us some notions as to when he might have felt this way.

Perhaps he was engaged in a battle. Or, it could have been when a jealous king Saul wanted to catch and execute him. Maybe it was when David's own son Absalom was trying to kill him. Obviously, this episode could correspond to something not even recorded in the Bible. There does appear to be some desperation here. Notice that the phrase, "How long..." is the start to four different questions.

In verse 2, one of those queries shows again the depth and constancy of his agony. "How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?" The word that here is translated "pain" can also be heard as asking "hold counsel." All day long, he is distracted. Maybe quietly talking it all through aloud. When you walk around holding counsel in your soul, you are overwhelmed. In other words, he is living a preoccupied life. The embattled moment in which he lives is all-encompassing for him.

You've been there. We all probably have. I don't want anyone to feel that way, but I validate the experience because it's all too real a happening. Maybe this preoccupied, distracted soul is you. You are carrying the weight of circumstances related to this time of global illness. Or, you are short on money and the financial pressure has become a weight you bear. Perhaps you feel trapped in a job you hate. You said that thing that you shouldn't have, but you don't know how to apologize just yet. Maybe you are worried about a loved one, yet you feel helpless to do anything about their situation.

"How long, O Lord!" The writer of this psalm has faith, though. We see in v3 that he does believe God holds an answer. He has that much faith. Even more, verses 5 and 6 show us 3 more indicators that this writer has faith

in God. God has shown “steadfast love,” God holds the key to “salvation” and “dealt bountifully” with him before. Now, he is drawing on the overflow. He dips into the stored spiritual resources of his faith.

Prayer:

Lord of uncertain days, soothe our hearts. Sometimes in our uncertainty, we simply need to know that we are accompanied and that your outcomes in our lives are certain. Give us some reason to hope. Give us some reminder that you are with us, Lord. Amen.

June 28 - Matthew 10:40-42

by Dr. Charles Qualls

A Cup of Cold Water

40 "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42 and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple -- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Devotion:

“Ministry” is perhaps most simply defined as “the act of meeting needs.” That’s it. That simple. The “needs” part changes from day to day and from setting to setting. What someone in my part of town may need right now may differ from what you are doing for someone in your part of town. But when we minister, we meet needs.

In creative or non-profit workplaces, we are cautioned about situations where we may have to “pour cold water” on someone’s ideas. That is viewed as a dousing of their enthusiasm and willingness, even if their idea...ummm...isn’t the greatest. It’s a little racy to even mention, but we also grow up knowing what it means when someone says they “...took a cold shower.”

Yet here, the most vivid metaphor, the most lasting and positive image in this scripture text may be the mention of giving a cup of cold water.

Our scripture reading today begins with a reminder of how life and spirit work. There is a cause-and-effect connection between how welcoming we are and the goodness that is in our lives.

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous..."

Not that we can never have harm or misfortune visited upon us. I believe our writer is looking not only at near-term occasions, but especially now describes life across time. “On balance...” is a phrase I like to use. Yes, we can look at a good deed that was met with misdeed. We can recall a time we did or said the right thing and felt penalized by the reaction.

Now, we close with this reminder. A reminder that, on balance, when we give even a cup of cold water, we will have participated in God’s greater goodness. Here, the “cold water” is obviously the thirst-quenching and life-giving kind. Like a drink pulled from a cool well and served to a parched, suffering traveler. Every year, the Peachtree Road Race would pass in front of our former church. 60,000 runners participated, and we were the 2 mile mark. We always had a table set up from which volunteers handed out cups of cool water. The runners looked at us like we were handing them gold!

When we do things like this, we will have shared in the meeting of needs. That is one of the greatest callings that ever comes with faith in Jesus Christ. You, Franklin Baptist Church, are one of the “need-meetingest”

churches I have ever had the privilege of witnessing. At your core is a generosity that can only be born of the Spirit. May we continue to show our faith by living in ways that reflect our Lord!

Prayer:

May we hear your voice of call, and may we keep on heeding that voice by meeting needs in your name. Lord, we thank you for an inspiring body of believers who model for each other your generous, loving spirit. Amen.

June 29 - 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Do So More and More

9 Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, 11 to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, 12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Devotion:

Imagine your school, your hospital, your company or workplace having an evaluation. For some time, you anticipate the consultant or expert arriving. You put your best foot forward and have everything spiffed up. You are as ready as you know how to be. You will expect them to find deficiencies and to make recommendations. That is the name of the game. It also justifies their existence to some extent. The report wouldn't seem real if they didn't give some critiques that show "...opportunities for growth."

Often, that is what we are reading as we pick up one of the apostle Paul's letters to a New Testament church. He planted some of these churches, had visited most of them and stayed in touch with all of them. The letters, then, are his voice back to them. Sometimes, he was addressing a problem he had seen or heard about. Even during his time under house arrest in Rome, it is said that church leaders were occasionally dispatched to go and meet with Paul there. They would bring him news or issues from their churches, and he would consult with them.

If we read one of those workplace reports from a consultant, most of us skip to one of two parts. We either want to "rip the Band-Aid off" and see the deficiencies or we want to see what we may have been praised for. Then, we'll likely go back up and read the whole report.

Here in v9-12, the apostle says that he doesn't even need to instruct them in "love of brothers and sisters." They already do this so well! Hmmm....it might connect with us that we have heard that God is "love." We might remember that others will know us "...by our love." So, this is high praise from Paul. This church is finding active, tangible ways to show their genuine love. They have not so much spiffed up the place as they have actually established a track record of real love. This is good.

His only recommendation? That they do so even more. Paul believes that their hallmark of love will be what takes them forward best. He is urging them to trust God's spirit that is already leading them, and to move forward being a reflection of Christ.

Prayer:

God of our days, may we remember that there is supposed to be a connection between what we believe and how we live. May we trust you enough that active love would be our hallmark. Amen.

June 30 - 1 John 4:1-6

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Testing the Spirits

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. 4 Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Devotion:

It's so easy to get fooled. We all probably have been tricked by someone or will fall victim to an unscrupulous person at some point. All of us. Barbara Corcoran is best known as one of TV's *Shark Tank* personalities. She does business in her real life on an enormous scale, and all over the world. She runs a sophisticated and successful organization. She is a savvy person.

So it was that a simple, nearly \$400,000 scam almost got past her. Had an alert assistant not raised some questions, the money would have been gone. It was already being wired from her account to a bank. From there, it would have been sent to its final destination.

Of course, being fooled by someone doesn't always involve financial transactions. Nor does it always necessarily even have to involve someone who is willfully being dishonest. Sometimes false doctrine is borne of ignorance.

Spiritually, I have spent a career watching Christians fall victim to false teachers and false doctrine. It usually comes through the "doorways" of a dynamic, convincing personality. This can happen within your local church. It can happen by way of the TV preacher whose slick ministry and polished communication must be an indicator of their rightness, you think. It can happen when the loudest and most stubborn voice within a church is given a disproportionate hearing. Always because people have not taken the effort they should to mature their faith, they can so easily be fooled.

Jesus pointed out the dangers. The apostle Paul struggled with false teachers within the churches to which he wrote. He pointed out the allure of the convincing voice who may be peddling something that isn't real. Now in 1 John, we hear yet another echo of these warnings. Everything that says it is Christian isn't Christian. Every pulpit doesn't need your ear. Every god-talking, sincere seeming person won't necessarily lead you closer to Jesus. It's worth the effort to be discerning. In fact, it's crucial.

Prayer:

Lord, give us motivated hearts to seek after the treasures of a mature faith in Christ. Cause us to want to know your voice when we hear it, so that we can also know all the other voices before they trick us. Amen.

July 1 - Matthew 11:20-24

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Woes to Unrepentant Cities

²⁰ Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades.

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you."

Devotion:

Have you ever watched a “TV” preacher from a distance? Have you ever thought that if your preacher preached just like the “TV” preacher that the church would be more prosperous? If so, you would fit in with the crowd in the communities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, Tyre, Sidon and Capernaum. What do these communities have in common? Jesus had harsh words that would condemn the people that lived there. Why would Jesus condemn them?

For Jesus, this was personal. Because these people had witnessed numerous miracles of Jesus, but yet did not believe, they were condemned. Do you remember the miracles that Jesus performed in Capernaum? There were numerous examples because Capernaum was the base of Jesus’ ministry. Throughout the Gospels, there are twelve recorded miracles in Capernaum in Matthew: Miraculous catching of fish; the curing of Simon’s wife’s mother and others; the healing of a leper; the healing of the man lowered down from the roof; the healing of a man’s withered hand; the healing of a blind and deaf demoniac, etc.

The people who resided in these communities have had ample evidence of Jesus and Jesus’ teaching, but yet they do not believe. It was near Capernaum that Jesus gave his famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus’ teaching was beyond any teaching the people had ever experienced. He was able to heal and often with only a touch of his hand.

The bottom line is this -- the people of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida were called to repent, to turn away from their sins and then to devote themselves to the way of faith. Why did they not repent? Jesus knew their hearts and knew they were unrepentant. Jesus also knew why they did not repent -- because of their indifference. The crowds had received the very best that Jesus had to offer, but yet remained unrepentant.

Today the same is true -- how do we move from indifference to active faith? The miraculous power of Jesus is all around us and available, just like it was all around the people of Capernaum.

Are you indifferent to the Gospel? Has your familiarity with the Gospel moved you to contempt rather than faith?

It is my prayer that each of us would be moved from indifference to active faith.

Prayer:

Infinite and loving God, we seek your love and acceptance in a difficult time. Strengthen us so that our faith will become active. Amen.

July 2 - Psalm 145:8-14
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Praise

⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹ The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, ¹² to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. ¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Devotion:

This is the only Psalm that is referred to only as “praise.” Our section begins and ends with “the Lord is gracious” (V 8; 13 b). In these short verses we find a magnificent credo of praising God. We praise God because God is gracious and merciful; slow to anger; abounding in steadfast love; good to all; God's compassion is over all that God has made.

This Psalm describes in detail the primary purpose of praise -- to confess one's faith. Praise is sung as a means of bearing witness to and confessing one's faith. If this Psalm is a Psalm of praise, then verses 8-9 form the creed of praise. The Lord is gracious...merciful...slow to anger.....abounding in steadfast love...good to all...has compassion over all God has made. I realize that I have repeated the first paragraph, but repetition is necessary to convey the limitless expanse of God's love. When we think of ourselves and God, why does God even acknowledge us? Why is God so loving and gracious?

The answer to these questions is simple -- God's actions reveal God's character. This section of Psalm 145 emphasizes God's faithfulness to God's people. We are extolled to present to God our praise, admiration, appreciation and thanks. When we consider *everything* that God has done for us, how can we not praise God?

This Psalm foreshadows a time to come when all people will gather to worship and recognize God. All who trust in God will be satisfied because God is filled of love.

In verse 14, we find a word for today. Are you ever overwhelmed by your burdens and concerns? Do you ever feel as if you cannot simply place one foot in front of the other and continue your journey? If you are at the breaking point, turn to God for help. God is ready, willing and able to uphold you, to lift you up and to bear your burden.

I realize that many are struggling during this pandemic. I realize that many feel they are approaching their breaking point. But, no matter what, God is available to help you, to lift you up and to bear your burden. “With God, all things are possible!” (Matthew 19:26)

Prayer:

Faithful God, thank you for your gracious mercy to your people. May our lives reflect your praise. Amen.