



## Daily Devotionals – July 10 to July 16, 2021

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

### July 10 - Romans 15:14-21 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson *Paul's Reason for Writing So Boldly*

<sup>14</sup> I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. <sup>15</sup> Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. <sup>17</sup> In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. <sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ. <sup>20</sup> Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, <sup>21</sup> but as it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him shall see,  
and those who have never heard of him shall understand.”

#### **Devotion:**

There is an old story about Michelangelo which states his belief that inside every piece of marble resided an angel. Thus, it was his goal to find and release the angel that resided inside the block of marble. Paul was a lot like Michelangelo, because he did not desire praise, he only wanted to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is near the end of his letter and as such it is chocked full of “last minute” instructions. His goal was to impress upon the Romans his teachings which were derived from Christ. These instructions were necessary and important because of his plans for a future trip to Rome.

Verses 15-16 reinforce this view of a reminder to the Romans. If you remember, Paul was seen as a bit of a strange fellow in the ancient world. Can't you imagine Paul wandering, talking, arguing, praying, suffering, making tents, weeping, staying without an itinerary, and always talking to God. His talking about God would be strange to some that would hear him: Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as Son of God, Jesus as Lord, and Jesus being raised from the dead. Paul could have been thought of as a Jewish apologist, except his message was not remotely related to what the Jews had dared to dream about. To be sure, Paul's friends would vouch for him and his message.

Paul's message and priestly service were sure to be stumbling blocks for some. How did Paul overcome this obstacle? He simply referred to his work and ministry as coming from God and that his ministry was to the Gentiles so they might come to believe. In essence, Paul related his experiences in service to God.

Paul's goal is not in doubt, his ambition is to proclaim the good news of Christ (V19). Because of Paul's reputation, ministry, and relationship with Christ, his proclamation always inspired others by his witness.

What can we learn from this passage?

- Paul's faith inspired confidence.
- Paul's faith and knowledge gave him the right to instruct the Romans.
- Paul's ministry focused on being used by God.
- Paul boasted not in himself, but in Christ Jesus.

Questions for thought...

Are we confident in our faith?

Do we understand all that the Lord accomplished for us?

Are we able to boast in God and not ourselves?

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, thank you for the ministry of the Apostle Paul. As we study his writings, equip us to understand and apply his lessons to our lives. Amen.

**July 11th - Psalm 65:9-13**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***You Crown the Year with Your Bounty***

9 You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

10 You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.

11 You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness .12 The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, 13 the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

**Devotion:**

Around here, there are at least two easy ways we could read this stretch of Psalm 65. Both of them would be right and most helpful to us. One would be to take in the prevailing agricultural images and celebrate that which seems to happen so naturally.

I'm not so sure that farmers would agree. But I know that those who garden a bit, as well as some who just like to work in their yards, have a philosophy about the rains that come from above. We may wish we could predict them a little better, these natural showers. And we may wish we could spread them a little more evenly. After all, who hasn't experienced the frustration of a drought followed by sustained rains that simply ran off. But, the consensus is that we can't artificially water in any way that does as well as a good, natural rain will.

Yes, God's nourishing of the earth over the long stretch of time is something to behold. The natural wonders of our earth abound as a testament to our Creator. So it would be enough to hear this psalm and give thanks for what God does.

But what if that weren't exactly what the psalmist is talking about here? What if all of this is a metaphor that points to something even bigger? That seems to be where the psalmist is headed. If God visits nourishment on the natural earth, how much more does God tend the fields of our lives? You and I are the grounds that are being rained upon by God's life-giving water. Our hearts and spirits are the pastures, furrows and hills upon which God's goodness is displayed.

On this day, let us be thankful that God has not simply made us and set us loose to fend for ourselves. Instead, God moves in subtle ways within Creation. God is, patiently and sometimes too slowly, bringing about a refinement of Creation. God is working toward resolution by remaining active in just the ways you and I need. Thanks be to God!

**Prayer:**

God of rain and God of nourishment, thank you for the effort you put into sustaining all of your Creation. May we have eyes to see what you do among us by the movement of your Spirit. Amen.

**July 12 - Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**  
**by Dr. Charles Qualls**  
***He Got into a Boat and Sat There***

13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2 Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil.

6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Let anyone with ears listen!"

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.

22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. 23 But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

**Devotion:**

Let's be sure we remember some of the basic characteristics of good parables. This devotional text revolves around Jesus' use of a teaching story or "parable." They are beautiful things, these vehicles Jesus employed to drive home a timely lesson or two. They can also be a little tricky.

We've already acknowledged that they drew upon familiar, everyday images. There is almost never just one lesson or truth the hearer should gain. These parables taught layers of meaning with many implications. Jesus almost always used some kind of exaggeration as he wove his teaching parables. Often, there were dimensions that the disciples were privy to, but not everyone else would have understood.

Yes, Jesus taught in parables. Be sure you read this one carefully. They were, on the surface, understandable stories. On the other hand, the truths they conveyed were sometimes complicated and eternal. Something fascinating happens in this story, for something Jesus did seems to layer a parable on top of his own teaching parable. Jesus' stepping into the boat put him in a transitional space between solid land and the uncertainty or danger of the water. That is emblematic of what he was about to teach them when he used the parable!

Believers have a set of responsibilities. Among the lessons this parable delivers, one is that we start by choosing what type of soil the seeds of Christ's good news will fall upon. We'll be challenged in this text to consider what we offer God that helps us to do 3 important things: 1) to receive, 2) retain and then 3) share this good news of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship is at the heart of this lesson. Discipleship is a lifelong assignment for the Christian. We never "make it." What we give God to work with is a growing process that we get to participate in. What will you have to work on so that your life is the best kind of soil?

**Prayer:**

Lord, at all ages and all seasons of life, may we ever continue to till the fields of our souls. Our prayer is that we would present you with receptive, fertile soil in which you would plant an eternal crop. Amen.

**July 13 - Micah 1:1-5**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Judgment Pronounced against Samaria***

1 The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

2 Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it; and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

3 For lo, the Lord is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. 4 Then the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will burst open, like wax near the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.

5 All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?

**Devotion:**

I searched the assigned scripture readings for today. These devotionals are based on lectional readings that Christians the world over are using each day. Could we depart from them? Of course. Were there "brighter, happier" scriptures I could have deviated and chosen? Yes.

Still, we need to be challenged occasionally. A steady diet of only the "happy" scriptures would be like you serving yourself a heaping dollop of mashed potatoes. Every. Single. Day. Only buttery good mashed potatoes on your plate, and nothing else. Especially in a global pandemic, that would be comforting. Except that it's not a balanced diet. You need other things, including protein and leafy greens. The broader arc of our holy scriptures causes us to take in a balanced diet. Because we need to for maturity.

It's good for us to see what irritates God. Because even that instructs and guides us. In his leadership book called "Management of the Absurd," author Richard Farson has an interesting take. He says that we may learn a lot from our own successes. And we may learn a lot from our failures. But our best learning opportunities may come from other peoples' failures. The cautionary tales. If he's right, today's scripture brings to the Believer one such opportunity.

What in the world has brought this breadth of judgment down upon the houses of Israel and Samaria? Well, isn't that the whole biblical story? Micah was a "minor" prophet whose voice joined the others in pronouncing God's disappointment of the day. God's people had strayed from what they knew, and their time to pay was fast approaching. There was much injustice that they had a hand in perpetuating. They were ignoring some of the very people and causes that God held dear. They were also ignoring the call to gather, worship and pay attention to their Divine Creator. Is any of this sounding familiar?

My relationship with God is never just about “God-and-me.” That’s where people in today’s culture try to relegate the things of the faith. Today, we are reminded that not only should we maintain a vibrant, close faith with God individually. But that we also are held accountable collectively. How we perpetuate the power-structures of our society, and that in turn do wrong in the eyes of God, can come back to bite us. How we perpetuate injustice racially, economically and otherwise...falls under God’s scrutiny.

Here’s your biblical literacy trivia question in 2 parts. I want you to email or message me privately as you say the answer aloud. Here goes-- A) What occupied the “high place” in Jerusalem of Judah? and B) What happened to it, after Micah and others prophesied these things?

**Prayer:**

Lord, may we in time hear your voice and seek to follow you more closely. May we gather faithfully, worship regularly, and live according to your priorities rather than our encultured ones. May you find us faithful. Amen.

**July 14 - Ephesians 4:17-5:2**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***The Old Life and the New***

17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. 19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 That is not the way you learned Christ!

21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil. 28 Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**Devotion:**

“The longest journey any of us take is the one between what we think or believe to how we actually live.” I quoted that recently in a sermon. It was said by Dr. Fred Craddock, and I believe captures a universal struggle of faith.

I wish you could see Ephesus for yourself. Well, what I mean is that I wish you could see today’s ruins of ancient Ephesus. I have large framed color pictures that hang in my office. It doesn’t take but a minute to realize that in Paul’s time, these folks were living in the lap of luxury. Ephesus was a wealthy, swanky place. They had the best of everything because they had seized the economy of the day and were riding high.

In the history of our faith -- especially as evidenced by the biblical story -- where there is great affluence and independence, our attention to God can wane.

That will be the grossest understatement you will hear today. American history shows the very same. The Ephesians weren't bad people necessarily. But they were needing some challenge to stay firm and rooted in their faith. If you read today's text in that light, you'll hear what Paul was working with.

The apostle was imploring them to have a stronger connection between their beliefs and the way they were living. You and I should be captivated by what he told them to stop doing. How they treated each other betrayed what was really in their hearts. His most vivid prescription: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

**Prayer:**

Lord of our faith, may we reach deep down to the child still alive in us. May we permit ourselves to imitate something worthy...that being your own loving essence. Amen.

**July 15 - Matthew 13:10-17**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***The Purpose of the Parables***

<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup> He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup> For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>13</sup> The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' <sup>14</sup> With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. <sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn -- and I would heal them.'

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. <sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

**Devotion:**

Have you ever received news that you did not want to hear? Have you ever questioned the bearer of difficult news? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then you can relate to Jesus' disciples.

This passage opens with the disciples questioning Jesus, not the other way around. It appears that the disciples have grown weary of Jesus' teaching in parables. "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (v10) Jesus answers them, but probably in a manner in which they do not want to hear. In essence, Jesus' teaching is not one of explaining the parable, but one of walking alongside with the disciples as they grapple with the meaning.

Mark Actemeter suggests that Jesus' aim is not to cause blindness in his hearers, but rather to *illuminate* a previously existing condition of blindness of which they are unaware.

So, what are the points of learning that we can glean from these verses?

\* One of the possibilities of Jesus teaching in parables is that the learning is continual -- that is, we have the opportunity to learn throughout our lifetime from the parable.

\* By teaching in parables, Jesus reminds his disciples that they cannot understand everything in Jesus' teaching.

\* This parable reminds us of the parable of the sower – that all of the seed will not sprout and grow – some will fall into rocky places and will not prosper. Indeed, this tells us that not everyone will gladly receive our news concerning Jesus. In fact, some will outright reject this news. That sentence causes me to tremble before the Lord because we are all accountable to God for both our actions and our inactions.

- The life of the disciple includes loss and disappointment. It is true that the Gospel offers abundant hope and possibilities and also loss and disappointment.
- This passage reinforces the true nature of discipleship and kingdom work is an essential place in our ministry.

How do you and I deal with disappointment? Some would redouble their efforts in response to disappointment. But if we dig deeper, we will discover that God's work is often more hidden, mysterious and silent than we would prefer. It is our job to respond to disappointment with faith, not with anxiety.

Today we all are trying to cope with the pandemic. To many, the news can be depressing. To many, it is difficult to see a way forward. But to the disciple, this is only a temporary disappointment. We have ultimate optimism because one day our faith will become sight!

**Prayer:**

Loving Lord, please continue to teach us in your way of love. Thank you for giving us the confidence to live our lives in faithful obedience to your call. Amen.

**July 16 - Psalm 139:1-12**  
**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**  
***The Inescapable God***

**To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.**

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, you have searched me and known me. <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. <sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," <sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

**Devotion:**

This Psalm has long been one of my favorites! It holds a special place in my heart because it has spoken to me in a variety of times, places and settings in my life. Hopefully, this might become one of your favorites also.

The psalmist begins by acknowledging that God knows everything about us. There is nothing that is not known by God about us -- truly a terrifying thought!

The Psalmist confirms that God knows us and also that God is with us! Just as we read in Romans 8, Psalm 139 also states that God is with us.

Verses 1-6 remind the reader that we are incapable of escaping God, no matter what. God's reach is so far that God knows the words that we will speak even before think about speaking them! In short, there is nothing about us that is not known to God. God's love reaches us even before we know it.

Verses 7-12 addresses how God knows even our surroundings. Where can I go from your Spirit? The Psalmist then spells out the earth as it was known during this period.

Not even the most remote part of the earth, the sea and the sky are able to separate God's love from me.

Psalm 139 teaches us that wherever we find ourselves in this life that God is with us and God is for us. When we begin to understand this concept, we are able to entrust our lives to this God who knows no end. Thus we rejoice that God's love pursues us, and God's love will not end.

God's love is active in our lives and is from everlasting to everlasting, from the beginning to the ending of our lives. There is no place, no action and no event that is able to separate us from God's love. In short, we cannot escape God's love -- we can only reject God's gracious offer.

Question: Do our lives reflect the loving nature of God?

**Prayer:**

Thank you for loving us, even when we are incapable of understanding your love. May our lives reflect the beauty of your love that we experience each day. Amen.