



Daily Devotionals – July 17 to July 23, 2021

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

July 17 - Hebrews 6:13-20 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson *The Certainty of God's Promise*

¹³ When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you." ¹⁵ And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. ¹⁶ Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. ¹⁷ In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, ¹⁸ so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Devotion:

The writer of Hebrews develops dual themes: God's faithfulness and Abraham's (our) faith. I am delighted that the major focus is on God's faithfulness. Fred Craddock states that these verses remind us that God is dependable, that God does not break promises and that God does not abandon.

This section begins with a discussion concerning the faith of Abraham and God's promise to Abraham. Verse 14 states that God will surely bless and multiply Abraham. Thus, God is making Abraham our example of what trust in God may look like. God swore this oath to himself because no one is greater than God. This passage sets up nicely the ending verses 19 and 20.

"We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a soul that enters the inner shrine before the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." (Abraham's faith journey is outlined in greater detail in Hebrews 11:8-22)

One theme exhorts the reader to be faithful to God whom we love and implies that those who are faithful will inherit the promises of God. The second theme receives more attention that God's promise is guaranteed by an oath. God promises to bless Abraham by multiplying his offspring and also by possession of a new land.

God's promise to Abraham and his heirs are those who will inherit salvation (V16-17). Since God cannot lie, this hope is unchangeable, irrevocable and immutable.

So the pillars that we have are faith and hope. Our faith believes that God will complete what God has started and hope is a necessary ingredient to keep us focused. It is our hope that challenges us and moves us forward. It is our hope that understands that Jesus is our great high priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.

One reading of this passage reminds us that no matter how difficult our journey may be, we have the promise from God to Abraham (and to us) that we have Jesus as our great high priest. Christ entered the inner shrine (the holy of holies) *for us*. Only a high priest could enter the inner sanctuary, behind the curtain and that only

happened only one day a year in order to make a sacrifice for the sins of Israel. This is the reason that Christ had to claim status as a high priest, and that ground is Melchizedek. Christ spilled his blood so that our sins could be forgiven, not once every year, but once for all time.

Thus we have the certainty of God's promise to us, and we need to remember that God's promise cannot be broken. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Prayer:

Faithful and persistent God, thank you for the provisions in this life and also in the life to come. Replace our doubt with faith, and our limited sight with your unlimited vision for the life to come. Amen.

July 18th - Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

by Dr. Charles Qualls

You Are There

1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. 3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

24 See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Devotion:

You are reading some of my very favorite scripture. I have long found the 139th psalm to be one of the most honest and fascinating monologues with God. There is a vulnerable quality, along with a matter-of-fact processing of theology here, that gives us a real gift. This writer has considered the very presence and nature of God and has reached some comforting conclusions.

First of all, he deals in some detail with the ever-present reality of our Creator. This person believes that God is nearby and attentive to him. If you need, go back and reread v1-12. Notice how comprehensively he experiences God to be near and taking note of what is happening in his life.

Coming from a narcissist, this would be off-putting to read. It could sound as though it was all about them, and that they implore the Lord's attention. Instead, this person seems simply to have concluded that whether he desired God to be near...or whether he wished God weren't...still God is close by. Similarly, he feels that God knows his thoughts and his deeds, but he does not feel invaded by that nearness. He seems to have reached the conclusion that this is all inevitable, and on balance he is at peace with God's closeness.

As you read, be sure to pay attention to how far the psalmist experiences God's reach to extend. The ancient Hebrews didn't have a concept quite like the "hell" that some picture. But "Sheol" was the dark place of the dead. A very final place for those not ushered into paradise. Whether heaven or Sheol, he cannot run far enough away to escape God. God has no limits. (v7-8)

Two things I love near the end, and I don't want us to miss them. First, he says that God shines a light into the darkness. And that darkness isn't dark to God at all. I need to hear that. I need to have that as part of my faith. The second thing is to pay attention to the verbs in v23-24. Identify and count the verbs. They are mature invitations extended to God by the psalmist. They are a beautiful response to all of God's power and nearness.

Prayer:

Oh God, you know no limits. You are near, yet your nearness is intended to accompany and not to cramp us. Thank you that you know us, and that you care. May you continue to care about the world in which we live, and intervene in the ways you know best. Amen.

July 19 - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Parable of the Weeds

13:24 He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 27 And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' 28 He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

30 Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" 36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."

37 He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; 38 the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

40 Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, 42 and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Devotion:

I had my spiritual upbringing couched in a well-intentioned myth. You may have, too. Or at least there was an implication. The implication was that if I were a faithful Christian, then God would look out for me in special ways. God would protect me and that I would essentially "win" in life. A tough awakening, then, was to discover that pain and suffering could be as much a feature of my life as anybody's. Why not me, after all? Why would I expect God to build a bubble or a protective force-field around my life? Why wouldn't I, by some measures, expect to finish second, third or even lose occasionally?

Following a five-decade career as a player and manager in Major League baseball, Leo Durocher wrote his autobiography. He called it "Nice Guys Finish Last." That title illustrated the hard spiritual awakening that I had to eventually live through, at least sometimes. One can be faithful, do as much good as possible, and still sometimes feel as though they have finished last. You can do things the right way and a cheater may still win. A healthy workout warrior sometimes gets cancer. Life can be unfair that way.

In this parable, Jesus explores that dynamic a bit. You'll have to read it for yourself and ask yourself who and what the main players are. But good crops spring up, only to be choked by stubborn weeds. A person with bad or selfish intentions has had their way with a good crop. The farmer makes the decision to let the weeds remain, lest the good crops be harmed in the effort to remove the weeds. Does this explain the presence of pain and suffering in our lives? The effects of evil? How so?

Maybe no one at all has really "done you wrong." Maybe life itself has been hard, with tragedies claiming loved ones, or your own health or finances taking a bad turn. We may read this parable and stray over into our own hardships, with "life" wearing the villain's dark hat.

So study this one with attention and with an open spirit. Ask your own questions of this parable. The disciples sure did! They waited until they got Jesus inside a house, and then they asked for an explanation. Check out what he said to them in reply. Do you hear what I hear? The hard news is that God's sorting of weeds vs. good crops may come later than we'd like. It may be at the "end of the age." How do you respond to that?

Prayer:

Lord of our lives, work with us as we sort out what you promise us and what you don't. Help us to see the good in living faithful lives, even if we can't very often determine our own outcomes. Still, may we find trust in you until our days are over. Amen.

July 20 - Isaiah 44:6-8
by Dr. Charles Qualls
The First and the Last

6 Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

7 Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be.

8 Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

Devotion:

I hope you'll remember this short scripture text the next time a daily reading goes a little long. They vary that way. This one let you off easy. However, don't mistake the brevity of this passage for it being light of weight.

In v6, the prophet Isaiah conveys some heavy claims about God. They are substantial when you consider what he proclaims to be true. We are so comfortable with the word "Lord" because it has been a part of our spiritual vernacular forever. To proclaim God as Lord, and mean it, says that you are not ultimately in charge of your life. God is. God is the leader of your life. Further, this prophet says God is "king" over Israel. That is what scholars call a "high" view of God.

When we get to "redeemer" and "Lord of hosts," these we may need to unpack a little. How long would Israel dream of being "redeemed" from the dangers of threatening neighbors and finally from the exile and occupation of the Babylonians? Of course, we know that this promise would grow with time. For soon other increasingly larger empires would swallow up each successive one. Might this God one day make good on that promise? This was a source of hope. As to "Lord of hosts," there was no higher title. This meant that God was a higher power whose reach exceeded even the seas, the earth and the heavens.

John will pick up on this theme of "the first and the last" in both his Gospel and in the Revelation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Then, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" we hear in Revelation 21.

Why does this matter? This is the proclamation of a God who is able. Able to have not only withstood time, which would be enough. But rather to transcend time itself. Fact is, God created time. Speaking of "time," we live in an era where we need a big God. This is the presence of a God big enough for the uncertainty of our days. Big enough to have a word to speak into your life and mine. Big enough to have been here before us, and to still be present long after us.

Prayer:

God of our days, and God of all days. We put our trust in you. You have seen more than we have, and in fact you see more than we do right now. May we call upon you for strength and hope. Amen.

July 21 - Genesis 33:1-17
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Jacob and Esau Meet

33 Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3 He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5 When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6 Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; 7 Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. 8 Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord." 9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." 10 Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God -- since you have received me with such favor. 11 Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it.

12 Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you." 13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. 14 Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

15 So Esau said, "Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "Why should my lord be so kind to me?" 16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. 17 But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

Devotion:

I hear so much superstition being used these days to reflect on life. I hear it inside and outside the church. Many people will philosophize and say things like, "Well, I'm a firm believer in things working out the way they should." I suppose on some level, that'd be a comforting way to see things. I also hear people of faith say, "It happened, so it must have been God's will."

Sadly, this is how we can become blinded by our own denial about choice. The story of Jacob and Esau is a story about the cascading consequences of the choices that God leaves us free to make. Ya*cob or “Jacob” is a name that translates “clinging to the heel.” The Bible says that twins Esau and Jacob were born at the same time, with Esau emerging first but Jacob immediately following, with a hand grasping his brother’s heel. This was emblematic of their rivalrous relationship all the way into their young adulthood.

You remember the story. As first-born son in a Hebrew family, Esau was entitled to his fair portion of their father Isaac’s wealth. “Birthright” entitled one to 2 things: 1) a double portion of any inheritance and 2) the leadership power of being head of family once the patriarch had died. Esau was impulsive, and one day he traded his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew his brother had cooked. However, Jacob was his mother Rebekah’s favorite. She helped him concoct a scheme whereby his now old and blind father would give Jacob the birthright that rightly belonged to Esau, just in case the “stew exchange” didn’t seem binding.

Sure enough, once Esau realized that he had been duped, he immediately regretted his actions. What’s more, he expected his brother to rescind his ill-gotten position. When that did not happen, Jacob realized the need to flee for his own safety. Time passed, and Esau retained Isaac’s wealth and possessions simply because he was the one still at home. Meanwhile, Jacob also managed to amass a fortune along with two wives and many children.

Now, the reunion finally happens. Can you feel the brokenness in Jacob? Can you measure the cost of emotional anguish between the two brothers and their subsequent descendants? Can you weigh the lost time, given over to distance because of deception, greed, impulse and bad choices? The reunion is beautiful and instructive to us. They pulled it all together, later in life, while there was still time. However, you know and I know that they never made up for the lost time. That is impossible.

God never wills us to be selfish and greedy. God never wants families to break apart, especially over “stuff.” God never wants us to be short-sighted and impulsive, nor scheming and deceptive. However, despite our freedom to make exactly those choices, sometimes if we allow -- God will lead us toward restoration while there is still time.

Prayer:

Lord, may we find hope in stories like this. May you also visit wisdom unto us from cautionary tales like this one. May we own our choices and their consequences. And may we find hope in your grace that you can sometimes slowly lead healing to happen. Amen.

July 22 - Psalm 139:13-18

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Inescapable God, Part 2

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸ I try to count them --they are more than the sand; I come to the end -- I am still with you.

Devotion:

This section of Psalm 139 starts by showing God’s intimate knowledge of the Psalmist and then moves to include the creative activity of God. “For it was you” (V13) indicates God’s activity and God’s love for each

person. This section reminds us that God is our benevolent and loving God, knitting us into his creative plan for humanity.

God has known us before we knew who God is. God even knew us before our birth – in our mother’s womb. God’s knowledge of us is exhausting, that is, he knows everything about us. God formed us, created us, and still loves us, even when our actions do not bring glory to God. This is truly a God who knows no limitations!

This section serves as a reminder that God knows our thoughts, but we cannot comprehend God’s thoughts. The reassurance of God’s presence with us our whole life long is a tremendous comfort.

What lessons can we learn from this section of Psalm 139?

God is a loving God who makes provisions for us. God ordained our life span and overwhelms us with loving kindness all of our days.

God is an intimate God, who loves us unconditionally. Although our actions may not please God, God still loves us and welcomes us back “home.”

God’s wonderful works are beyond our comprehension. “I try to count them -- they are more than the sand; I come to the end -- I am still with you.” (V18)

God does not merely observe the creation, but God is active in creation. Only a loving God would first create mankind and then allow them the ability to choose to relate to, or reject God.

God continually takes all of our abilities and contributions and molds and weaves them together to bring about God’s purpose.

Happiness for the Psalmist is an openness to God’s instruction because God knows the way of the righteous. (Emmanuel -- God with us)

God continues to be with us, even during this difficult time of pandemic. So, what can we do?

1. Pray -- pray for your family, your church family and your friends.
2. If you are able to assist someone, please do so safely, with a mask and an appropriate distance. Grocery shopping for someone who cannot go to the store is an investment in that person and yourself.
3. If you are able, send cards of support to those in need.
4. If you do not know exactly what to do, ask God to direct you in the way that you might help.

Remember that no one can accomplish everything, but if we place our individual efforts into God’s hands, then God can weave them into a beautiful tapestry of love.

Prayer:

Creative God, thank you for knowing us intimately. Thank you for loving us unconditionally. Thank you for accepting us into your kingdom and thank you for taking our feeble efforts and using them for your glory. Amen.

July 23 - Genesis 29:1-8
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Jacob Meets Rachel, Part I

29 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. 2 As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, 3 and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

4 Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." 5 He said to them, "Do you know Laban son of Nahor?" They said, "We do." 6 He said to them, "Is it well with him?" "Yes," they replied, "and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep." 7 He said, "Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them." 8 But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

Devotion:

Chapters 29-31 form a unit and follow Jacob's flight from Esau. This section records the journey of Jacob from Esau to Haran and eventually to his return to Canaan. Although family ties to the old country continue, Jacob will soon break those ties.

In Genesis 29: 1-14 we find a description of Jacob's arrival at Haran. Jacob observed a well in the field and three flocks of sheep waiting to be watered, alongside a large stone that covered the well. The stone was so large that it took several shepherds working together to move the stone. Thus, the shepherds waited until several shepherds came to assist in moving the stone.

Jacob inquired about the origins of the shepherds that were gathered. The shepherds replied that they were from Haran which prompted Jacob to ask of them, "Do you know Laban, son of Nahor?" (V5)

Following this scene, Jacob spots Rachel, daughter of Laban, and she captivated Jacob. The story continues and we learn additional details in tomorrow's lesson.

What can we absorb from this passage? We learn that Jacob can be a rather straightforward man, a man who acts to acquire what he loves. (Later in the story we learn that Jacob struggles with Laban over Leah and Rachel. (29:15-30)

We also learn from this account that Jacob is willing to work for what he desires. We also learn that just as Jacob deceived Esau, Laban would deceive Jacob over Leah and Rachel.

I believe that everyone can see a bit of themselves in Jacob. Some of us can see ourselves in Jacob's hardworking attribute, while others can see themselves in Jacob's deceitfulness. It is our responsibility to examine ourselves and our actions.

What does God see in us? Hopefully, God will recognize his children who are striving to become more Christ-like every day.

Prayer:

Ever-loving and faithful God, thank you for your continued influence in our lives. Amen.