



## Daily Devotionals – July 24 to July 30, 2021

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

### July 24 - Genesis 29:9-14 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson *Jacob Meets Rachel, Part 2*

<sup>9</sup> While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. <sup>10</sup> Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban. <sup>11</sup> Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. <sup>12</sup> And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

<sup>13</sup> When Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, <sup>14</sup> and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

#### **Devotion:**

Today's passage involves the breaking of tradition, family squabbles and an unexpected ending. Fasten your seat belts because this promises to be a wild ride!

We begin with a scene that is eerily reminiscent of other marriage stories: boy meets girl, boy is infatuated with girl, and then boy "proves" his love by performing some feat of strength to prove his worthiness to the girl. Jacob meets Rachel, who serves as Laban's (her father) keeper of the sheep. In that day, water was a major issue -- there were not sufficient resources for all to freely use. In essence, there was a sort of rationing of water to ensure that everyone had access to its life-giving qualities.

The practice of a stone large enough to cover the well was common, because it would take a number of shepherds to move the stone and gain access to the well. The stone covering the well ensured that the community received fair access to the water. Thus, multiple shepherds served as a safeguard so that everyone in the community received their fair amount of water.

Jacob waited for other shepherds to arrive, but they did not come quickly enough. Impatient and tired of waiting, Jacob rolls the stone away, by himself so that Rachel could water her sheep. If the stone was large enough to require several shepherds to move it, then Jacob's reputation became larger than life. Who among the community was strong enough to move the stone by themselves? This story paves the way for that first Easter morning when the women arrived early at the tomb only to find the stone had been rolled away by an angel.

Having established himself as a person of both strength and authority in this community, Jacob, the father of Israel, is a man to be reckoned with.

This story has the extreme emotions of kissing and weeping with Rachel, coupled with Laban's warm welcome and acknowledgement of kinship, simply imply harmony in the family. This Mayberry-like story will soon take a sharp turn as the story progresses with conflict and deception.

What lessons can we glean from this story?

-- Changes occur in life.

Just as family and relationships change, so do we also change. Jacob's family relationships experience profound changes with respect to the family structure. God often calls and challenges the faith community to move in a different direction. How can we discern God's call in the midst of a pandemic? How do we remain faithful to God's call during times of difficulty?

-- Families have conflict.

Jacob has a history of deception and this deception continues to play a role in his life. Just as Jacob deceived Esau, Israel has the same familiar pattern. And if we are truthful, we resemble Jacob's past. All we like sheep have gone astray. (Isaiah 53:6)

-- Deception can be countered by love and service.

God uses human wisdom to enact his purposes. Flawed as Jacob was, God still extends abundant blessings through his service.

-- Women serve as mediators of divine blessing in and through their children.

In this culture, women hold a central place in the story and birth of Israel. "Israel" emerged out of an intense struggle between Rachel and Leah, just as "Israel" emerges from the struggle between Jacob and God.

-- God does not require us to be perfect to be used in God's work.

God blesses Jacob's family despite the dysfunctional relationships. God is willing and able to bless our family despite our flaws. God's creative work is essential to our story and to the promise that God has made. Just because we cannot "see" God working, does not indicate God's inactivity.

Whatever we learn from Jacob's story, we rejoice that God continues to work through imperfect people like you and I.

**Prayer:**

Abundant God, thank you for continuing to work through us, despite our frailty and our failures. Help us to show our thanks by continuing to serve both you and our neighbor. Amen.

**July 25 - Psalm 105**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***God's Faithfulness to Israel***

1 O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.

3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. 4 Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually. 5 Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered, 6 O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

7 He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. 8 He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, 9 the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, 10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, 11 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance."

**Devotion:**

A psalm giving "thanks" to God is hardly a surprise, right? Not a headline maker, at least on the surface. This is a psalm that portrays a grateful heart just as so many others like it do. We could almost read through this and sigh, "That's nice..." and then move on.

Let's don't.

Instead, what if we took our time? What if we got in touch with our own deep and abiding sense of gratefulness? What if we thought of our interaction with God as a relationship, rather than a mere transaction? Then, perhaps we are reminded how healthy and appropriate it is to remember to say "thanks" now and then.

We live in a culture that can make us "expectant" so much of the time. Goods and services are so relatively convenient -- often a few keystrokes on our computer or phone -- that we get surprised and thankful less and less often. We can get a bit numb to the basic goodness in our lives, including that goodness which may be unique to our God!

V1-6 of this psalm are replete with steps we could (and should) take to rekindle our gratefulness to God. Stop and read through again. You might even list each practice you hear mentioned in these verses. Consider this more a roadmap and less a checklist. Give this a try, voicing your own gladness and thanks. Then, notice that in V7-11 the specific reasons seem to pertain to another place, time and people. Substitute your own list of reasons why you owe God some thanks, then. Try that and then offer up your own personal prayer to God.

Do you still say, "thank you" to your spouse? To your sibling or friends? To your neighbor or co-worker, even for little things? I sure hope so. I hope we don't take for granted those who are closest and most constant in our lives. Maybe this day, we develop a mindfulness about saying "Thank you," starting with the Creator first!

**Prayer:**

Oh God, thank you. No really...thank you for these reasons \_\_\_\_\_. Amen.

**July 26 - Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

by Dr. Charles Qualls

***The Kingdom is Like***

31 He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

33 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46 on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48 when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad."

49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." 52 And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been

trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

**Devotion:**

Have you ever gone to a fireworks show and noticed a pattern? You're there, watching things explode in the sky. Some of them are colorful. Others of them are big. You "oooo!" and "ahhh...!" Then right at the end, the sky explodes as a volley of fireworks are unleashed. You know the show is reaching its conclusion as they blow it all out.

We don't always know with the gospels how literally to take the chronology of stories and teachings. If you read all four gospels, they do argue with each other a little on the order in which things took place. This medley of little parables can feel like the end of the fireworks show. Was this Jesus' final effort to teach?

One person has surfaced two important overview points to all these parables. They may teach many things. But if we watch for two primary movements here, they will bring us rich meaning as we read and pray. First, these little parables show God's vision for the world. Jesus was giving us a glimpse of how things should be. Life the way God intended. Among so many outcomes, in these tiny parables we get a feel for just how special our relationship with God is supposed to be.

Second, they also preview how the Christian movement was going to evolve from little to much! Likewise, they may also illustrate our own personal journeys of faith. We might start out with little faith. Or with underdeveloped faith. Immature faith, even. If (and only if) we work at it, our faith can grow during our lifetimes. Again, life the way God intended.

Here is a reminder: Your Bible is a primary source for understanding how we live out our commitment. So we need to know what our Bible teaches. That will involve a lifetime of nurture and effort on our part.

I find in this era that there are a lot of people who will talk "about" God's word. There are a lot of people who will proclaim their love "for" or loyalty "to" the Bible. Sadly, in the churches I have served all too few of them appear to have actually studied that same Bible so much. Jesus' parables, and the other movements of the Gospels, make increasing sense the more biblically literate we are. So, what are some intentional things you can do to rediscover your "joy" in the faith? To grow your faith?

**Prayer:**

God, move us to treasure our faith. Help us to understand that you value each of us similarly. May we work to grow our faiths, as you intended us to do. Amen.

**July 27 - James 3:13-18**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Two Kinds of Wisdom***

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. 15 Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish.

16 For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

**Devotion:**

Who is *wise* and *understanding* among you?

That's not a bad question to ask a Christian believer. Because those whom we choose to describe with such words reflect something of who we are. These models reflect something about what we believe. We truly are identified by the company we keep.

This may be pulling the curtain back a little too far. But, Elizabeth will vouch for this. Often a minister away from his/her church is hesitant to be introduced to someone as "a pastor." That's just not the first thing I want most strangers to find out about me. Why? It's because people have such strange reactions to my profession. A stranger will suddenly apologize for the 16 cuss words they've already spoken. They will start telling you how active their sister's-cousin's-across-the-street-neighbor is in her church. They will search their minds and begin to tell you how much they appreciate the handful of TV preachers they've seen on their cable channels.

All the while, they have no idea that the person they are droning on with simply wants to experience them as they truly are.

Likewise, the other pastors you read or watch on TV can accidentally become your surrogate pastors. They can become what you compare me with. They become your resident theologians. Sometimes, that which sounds so good to your ears may not actually be wisdom. It may not be sound theology. Who is wise and understanding among you? Be careful who you let do your thinking for you.

In fact, become wise in God yourself. Do your own thinking. That's what I want for you and me. I want you to become the most mature version of your Christian self that you can be. Then, you'll know the difference between sound faith versus religion grown sick. You'll know the difference between weak pop-theology versus mature and biblical faith that is born of a lifetime of study and the Spirit's guidance. James is onto something important here. Wisdom can only come from one source: God.

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to know your voice from all the other ones competing for our hearts. May your sound words lead us. Give me the will to know better. Amen.

**July 28 - Psalm 119:121-128**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***I Have Done What is Right***

121 I have done what is just and right; do not leave me to my oppressors.

122 Guarantee your servant's well-being; do not let the godless oppress me.

123 My eyes fail from watching for your salvation, and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise.

124 Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes.

125 I am your servant; give me understanding, so that I may know your decrees.

126 It is time for the Lord to act, for your law has been broken.

127 Truly I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold.

128 Truly I direct my steps by all your precepts; I hate every false way.

**Devotion:**

I used to work with a pastor who slept well most nights. You know...office small talk can sometimes turn to "Did you get a good night's rest after a busy day yesterday?" Those kinds of questions. I noticed over time that his

answer was almost always “Yes I did sleep well. I have a clean conscience.” Over the years, I found myself musing on his funny response. “I have a clean conscience.” Maybe he was onto something after all.

A clean conscience has a lot of benefits. My mother used to say, “Always tell the truth and you don’t have to keep track of any lies.” That’s a riff on an old Mark Twain line. That’s also another way of speaking to the merits of a clean conscience.

The psalmist here in 119 has a clean conscience, and before the Lord of all audiences. “I have done what is just and right...guarantee your servant’s well-being.” This writer is either one of the least self-aware persons in all the Bible, or he is feeling “right” with God. I would like to think it’s the latter. Therefore, his approach or relationship with God is different than that of the broken, hesitant “sinner.” Different from the manipulative bargainer, as well. “I am your servant.” Have you said that to God recently?

Still he is not without his plea. “Do not leave me to my oppressors...do not let the godless oppress me.” This person recognizes that we can be in a relatively good relationship with our Creator and still suffer. Sometimes, bad things really do happen to good people. You know that.

Go back and read these verses again. This time, let’s pay less attention to his clean conscience and pay more attention to what he asks of God. What do you think of his requests? It’s a pretty healthy list. Sounds like a good relationship with God. I think we’d all aspire to be in a place like that. What do you think?

**Prayer:**

God of our living, may we give you the very best of who we are. Then, we may stand before you with reason for a clean conscience. May we give you open spirits with which to work. Amen.

**July 29 - Mark 4:30-34**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***The Parable of the Mustard Seed***

<sup>30</sup> He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup> yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

**The Use of Parables**

<sup>33</sup> With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup> he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

**Devotion:**

How can we understand the kingdom of God? How are we able to conceptualize the vastness of this kingdom? Thankfully, Jesus taught in parables so that we might be able to grasp some of his teaching possibilities.

Many are familiar with the mustard seed parable. Most of us have listened to numerous children’s sermons based on this passage. I will not contradict them, my goal is to offer another possibility in understanding this passage.

Jesus begins by asking a pointed question concerning the kingdom of God -- with what can we compare it to? Jesus answered the question by comparing the kingdom to a mustard seed, although not the smallest seed it is one of the smallest seeds known to man.

By using the example of a mustard seed, Jesus is signaling to his disciples that the kingdom will not be ushered in by their expectations. If the disciples had it their way, the kingdom would be a large and grand

kingdom which could be seen by everyone. But, notice that the mustard seed does not produce a grand tree, rather it produces a bush.

Faced with no doubt a disappointment, the disciples listened carefully so that they might understand. In my opinion they, like us, grasped a portion of the parable's meaning. In an unpublished paper, Agnes Norfleet notes that "by keeping it a shrub, Mark is differentiating the kingdom Jesus proclaims from past prophetic dreams of glory and hope to be like the other nations."

The kingdom is not identified with a great and mighty tree, but a lowly bush. The kingdom is not marked by an earthly king, but by a Messiah who is identified by lowliness, meekness and humility. This was certainly not the image that ancient Israel had in mind and the reality has become unsettling. The kingdom is surely coming, but will it be recognizable? It was almost as if the kingdom was coming in secret!

What are the advantages of a bush over a tree? One advantage is that the birds of the air will have a place to make their nests in the shade. Birds are important to God -- the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove (Mark 1:9-11); even the sparrow has made a house (Psalm 84:3) and the dove that signaled the flood had receded (Genesis 8:10-12).

God's kingdom acting like a mustard seed is a welcoming kingdom, offering shade to any bird that would land. Likewise the church can serve as a place of welcome and refuge from a world with so many issues today.

How can we create a church family that is welcoming to everyone? What attitudes need to change? How can we create a refuge for others in these trying days? The answer is to continuing to respond to others in a Christ-like manner each day.

**Prayer:**

Remind us, O God, that ministry is more about relationships with others than making a big splash, which is seen by all. May your strength go with us that we might be found faithful to your call. Amen.

**July 30 - Philippians 4:10-15**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Acknowledgment of the Philippians' Gift***

<sup>10</sup> I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

<sup>15</sup> You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone.

**Devotion:**

Philippians is often referred as Paul's joy letter. Some equate happiness with joy, but they are different. Happiness depends on our circumstances, whereas joy is a much deeper and stronger emotion. Joy is the quite confidence of God's love and work in our lives. Joy insists that God will remain with us no matter what. In essence, joy depends on Christ.

Our passage begins with Paul rejoicing greatly because the Philippians had sent him a gift for his ministry. Paul waited until the end of his letter to thank them, perhaps because he did not want to be accused of preaching only for the money. In an earlier letter, Paul advocated that it was a church's responsibility to support

God's ministers. It appears that he accepted the gift because it was given willingly and also because Paul needed the gift.

One of Paul's secrets was the ability to be content with whatever lot was his in life. Whether there was plenty or whether there was little, Paul had become accustomed to being content with his context.

All of us struggle from time to time, but especially during 2020. The lack of fellowship continues to disturb each of us. Fellowship with each other is extremely difficult now, but thankfully, fellowship with God continues. Paul was content with his circumstance because he viewed life from God's point of view. This allowed him to focus on things that he had to do, not on things that he should do. Paul's priorities were set in a right manner and as such he was thankful for everything that God had given him. Paul did not have an empty place in his life because God had completely filled Paul's life. If we depend on God and not allow "things" to compete for our attention, then we can approach Paul's contentment.

The power that we receive from Christ is more than sufficient to complete God's will and also the challenges that might arise from doing God's will. When trials come, we simply need to ask Christ to strengthen us.

The bottom line is this: our circumstances matter to God, our relationships matter to God, and yes, we matter to God. If we approach life with the outlook that God remains with us, then we can accomplish much for God's kingdom.

**Prayer:**

God of infinite compassion and power, we thank you that we can rejoice in your presence. We thank you that we draw strength from you for our journeys. Thank you for always being available to us, we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.