



Daily Devotionals – September 25 to October 1, 2021

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

September 25 - Acts 13:32-41 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson *The Good News Explained*

³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'

³⁴ As to his raising him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, 'I will give you the holy promises made to David.'

³⁵ Therefore he has also said in another psalm, 'You will not let your Holy One experience corruption.' ³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, died, was laid beside his ancestors, and experienced corruption; ³⁷ but he whom God raised up experienced no corruption. ³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; ³⁹ by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Beware, therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you.

Devotion:

Paul begins his spirited argument by quoting Psalm 2, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." This is the promise given first to their ancestors that is now fulfilled for us, their children. The resurrection of Jesus proves his identity as the Messiah. Although Paul makes no further mention of the citation of Psalm 2, he assumed that the text would not make sense if Jesus was dead. This prophecy also makes reference to the promises that were made and carried out even to the present generation. "I will give you the holy promises made to David..." (V 34b)

Paul then contrasts David to Jesus: David died and was laid among his ancestors and experienced corruption; whereas Jesus, whom God raised up did not experience corruption. Because of the work of Jesus, all who believe in him shall be set free from their sins.

Why is this passage important?

At a time when history remained an important factor to the potential Jewish convert, referring to King David was paramount. The Psalmist referred to "king" David as having experienced corruption whereas Jesus did not experience corruption. Believing in Jesus comes with the promise of sins forgiven (v39). When the potential Jewish convert began to understand that their hero, "king" David is surpassed by Jesus, then they begin to take notice. If this Jesus is greater than my king, David, then I owe it to myself to check him out. The promise of forgiveness of sins is indeed good news!

The fledging church needed to be grounded in a belief system that would not repel potential converts to the faith. Today's church needs to learn from this passage, build upon the past, but always focus on the future.

The message of Jesus reminds us that in God's timing everything can and will become new.

Because today's difficulties are not eternal, the best is yet to come to those that believe in Jesus.

Prayer:

God whose sight is endless, give us the ability to trust in your eternal plan. Amen.

September 26 - Mark 11:27-33

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Jesus' Authority Is Questioned

27 Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him 28 and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" 29 Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." 31 They argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But shall we say, 'Of human origin?'" -- they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Devotion:

Bless the priests, Pharisees and scribes. They were constantly trying to corner Jesus. I guess in some ways I have moderated my view on them slightly over the years. After all, they had jobs to do. Their system left them little wiggle room within which to deal with an anomaly like Jesus. Still, the system became the problem. God did not let them off the hook much in the last few hundred years before Christ.

Here now, so much for a nice entrance. As Jesus walks in the door, we get the impression the ambush was set. It's like they knew he was about to come in. "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" A quick glance back earlier in the chapter will remind you of just what Jesus had done. In addition to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem itself (don't you bet the authorities hated that?!), Jesus had also overturned the money-changers' tables in the temple courtyard. He took a whip and ran them out of the place.

So, yes. I am sure they wanted to question him. They also wanted to stop his movement, his momentum and his following. They always tried these questions, and he always outsmarted them. They asked a question, expecting answer A or answer B. Instead, he would give them answer C that they hadn't thought of. Here, he traded them a question for their question. When they had no answer, he refused to answer theirs. Same sort of deal.

What do we do with this other than be entertained? The lesson for us might come by pointing out that we often ask God (unwittingly or unconsciously) the same question they asked Jesus: "*By what authority?*" God urges us to include or to love an individual or a group that we more naturally dislike. By our actions (or lack of), we ask God "By what authority?" Jesus teaches us to be slow to anger or to rash action, but we fly off the handle. We dig in. We disfellowship, thereby asking God each time "By what authority" do you tell me to be more patient? *By what authority do you ask me to love? By what authority do you tell me to forgive? By what authority do you tell me to share what I have with others?*

Prayer:

Lord, help us to trust you. Help us to trust you more than we sometimes do. Help us to try life your way, and see if your Spirit doesn't guide us best every time. Amen.

September 27- Exodus 17:1-7

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Why Do We Test God?

17:1 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

2 The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

7 He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Devotion:

You may be like me in one regard. You are probably more open to new ideas, suggestions and especially complaints from people with whom you have a healthy relationship. I think that's pretty universal. Hey, none of us likes bad news. Anyone who'll say different isn't being truthful. But, you'll take critique from someone you love and trust way faster than from someone you...don't.

Nearly 30 years ago, I was fresh out of seminary. I was in my first church and trying my best. There was this one guy who I simply couldn't please. He was a retired chaplain. If I said it, he suggested a better way. If I had an idea, he had a better one. He was tough on me. I had been there about a year when he invited me over to his house to discuss a project. His wife had just served us tea when I asked him, "Do you just not like me, or are you this tough on everyone?" He grinned and said, "Which one do you think?" From there, we had the most honest conversation and forged a friendship which lasts to this very day. He became a helpful mentor of sorts. I later dedicated a book to him.

The people are still complaining, and yet God provides. That sentence summarizes the action between Moses and the people now. The Israelites are STILL belly-aching. They are taking out their issues on Moses and Aaron. However, this week's text reflects on why the people still needed to "test" God so badly. It also reflects on how God ultimately reacted to their lack of faith -- both then and later.

When was the last time you tested God? I'm sure at the time, you didn't think of what you did/said/prayed in quite that way. It probably all made sense to you. Previous to this, our scripture passages in Exodus have shown a doubting and complaining people in action. Don't get me wrong. If I had been among those ancient Israelites, I'm not sure my (lack of) faith would have been any different. However, think of these scenes from God's perspective for a moment. God had done a lot, and recently in their case. That should have proven that God was looking out for them. How much more did God need to prove? If we pick through our lives with God, and if we're honest, we may become aware of some occasions when we, too, have asked God to "...prove it!"

Moses asks two basic questions of the people: 1) Why are you blaming me? and 2) Why are you testing God? Those two questions will become central to both our faith practice and our belief itself. Here are some things to reflect on: Do we sometimes blame God's messengers when our real argument is with the God of the scripture? Do we argue with our leaders when our faith is the issue sometimes? Do we "test" God because we don't trust God, or because we actually DO know where God wants to lead us -- and we don't like that direction?

Prayer:

Almighty God, you have proven yourself in our days, too. May we have the awareness to look backward and see that you are good for your promises. Oh for trust to love you more. Amen.

September 28 - Exodus 18:1-12

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Jethro's Blessing and Advice

18 Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. 2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro took her back, 3 along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been an alien in a foreign land"), 4 and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"). 5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came into the wilderness where Moses was encamped at the mountain of God, bringing Moses' sons and wife to him. 6 He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons." 7 Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed down and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent. 8 Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had beset them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. 9 Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel, in delivering them from the Egyptians.

10 Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. 11 Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them." 12 And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

Devotion:

One time, I congratulated a friend on his daughter's engagement. His slight, ever-so-faint hesitation caught my attention. I whispered, "Not really who you would've picked?" He said in reply, "You know, no one was probably going to be ideal for me. He's not what I would have chosen for her. But I am learning to love him through her eyes." I appreciated his candor, but was sorry to hear that.

I am aware that sometimes, there is no one worthy of marrying your daughter. Or maybe no girl good enough for your son. Whatever they may wish to do, an in-law might be suspect. Always figuring their child is going to be the victim of the inevitable failure. At some point back, Moses' wife and children had moved back home to live with Jethro, her father. Meanwhile, Moses led the Israelites on out of Egypt and into the wilderness.

Now, the whole family came for a visit in the wilderness. Jethro saw the thousands that his son-in-law was leading. A Midianite priest, he had heard the stories of how God had used Moses to deliver a small nation from the enslaving clutches of Egypt. Now, they were pressing forward. God was still performing mighty acts that were indisputable. Jethro seems to have realized that Moses was, in fact, a powerful and capable leader.

We hear his gracious words, about Yahweh God here. If you read on, though, Jethro's generous assessment later in ch18 soon turns toward protecting and preserving his son-in-law. Jethro now believes -- and this is huge coming from a priest who doesn't worship God -- that the God of Israel is more powerful than all the other gods. Including his own. Moses is at the head of something powerful, Jethro sees!

But can he keep this up? Can he sustain being leader, holy intermediary and full-time "judge" over the throngs of Hebrew followers? As our chapter concludes, Jethro will design and suggest to Moses the structure that ended up ruling the Israelites until the time of King Saul. In the book of Acts, we'll see the church office of "Deacon" created for similar reasons. The pastor cannot possibly visit enough or "sit with..." enough to satisfy everyone and still cover all the other vital bases, too. So Jethro organized all of Israel for Moses.

All because he had come around to his son-in-law. And was worried about him now like the father Moses never got to have.

Prayer:

Help us to see each other as you do, God. Help us to see in others what you see in them, and may they give us the grace of doing the same. Amen.

September 29 - Numbers 11:1-9

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Complaining in the Desert

11:1 Now when the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, the Lord heard it and his anger was kindled. Then the fire of the Lord burned against them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. 2 But the people cried out to Moses; and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire abated. 3 So that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned against them.

4 The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color was like the color of gum resin. 8 The people went around and gathered it, ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, then boiled it in pots and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. 9 When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna would fall with it.

Devotion:

Oh my, how fickle and undevoted we humans can be. Any of us, really, on our worst day or in our worst season. If we take seriously the notion that Israel's story in the Bible is really the story of all humanity, then we are on display here.

This is the same God who has delivered them mightily from Egypt. First, there was the series of plagues that persuaded Pharaoh to release them in the first place. Then, the night of the Passover happened. On their escape, pursued by the Egyptian army, they crossed the Red Sea as the waters parted. Now, this very God -- who had the capability to do all that -- is the very God they don't trust. Their story is our story.

So, they complained. "All we have to eat is this manna!" We like to complain, too.

- I can flip through 100 cable channels and proclaim, "There's nothing to watch!"
- I can open a full pantry or freezer and say, "There's nothing to eat."
- People around Franklin complain, "There's nothing to do. This town is too small."
- Someone will say, "My football team won, but not by enough points."
- We can stand in a full closet and say, "I've got nothing to wear."
- People at church complain: "Why aren't we 'open' yet?" "This music isn't my style." "The preacher uses notes, and the one at my son's church doesn't." "I don't like the new sign." "Why don't we sing the old songs?" "You've got too many announcements in the bulletin."

We do like to complain.

Israel got tired of the manna. The same manna that all they had to do was walk out every morning and pick up. I sympathize. Same ole thing every day. But, at least they had it. God got angry at the complaining because of their ungratefulness. The fire of the Lord burned on the outskirts of camp and threatened to consume them. Moses interceded and begged God's mercy. God's heart softened.

God gave Moses a plan. "Go gather your elders. I will come be with you." Once there, God told them that their complaints had been heard. God promised to provide. What happened when a miraculous (and unlikely) provision of quail flew in and dropped at their feet? This was said by God to be 2 months' worth, these quail. A greedy people gathered up armloads and hoarded them immediately. God got angry with them again (this time at their greed) and made them sick with the quail they ate. Yikes. What a story.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to stop. Help us to look around at the quiet, the slowness, the limitation and reflection this pandemic has forced upon us. Help us to use that time to get in touch -- once again -- with just how rich our lives are. With how much we have to be thankful for. To look at who we should be thankful for. And to beg your forgiveness at how spoiled and fickle we can become. Amen.

September 30 - Matthew 9:2-8

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

² And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." ³ Then some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." ⁴ But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁵ For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? ⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- he then said to the paralytic -- "Stand up, take your bed and go to your home." ⁷ And he stood up and went to his home. ⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

Devotion:

What would you do to ensure that your friend could be healed or made whole? Today's passage tells of people carrying a paralyzed man who was lying on a bed to see Jesus.

Here is the backstory. The news of Jesus' ability to heal was gaining in popularity and his fame was spreading. With such amazing news, who wouldn't be anxious to meet this Jesus who has the ability to heal?

What is not clear is whether the man who was paralyzed asked his friends to take him to Jesus or if his friends insisted on taking him. What begins as a simple case of healing turns logic on its head and raises additional questions.

As often is the case, Jesus doesn't leave well enough alone. Jesus could have just healed the man of his paralysis, but he went beyond the original thought. Healing someone is not difficult for Jesus, but forgiving sins is reserved for God alone. The scribes were furious and accused Jesus of blaspheming God. Jesus, not surprised by their thoughts, turned the tables on the scribes. He answered their question with a question, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁵ For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? ⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- he then said to the paralytic -- "Stand up, take your bed and go to your home."

The scribes learned an important lesson from Jesus and we would do well to heed it as well. There is nothing that we can do that will surprise Jesus. There is nothing that we can do that evades Jesus' vision. Jesus delves straight into the issue, even to the heart of the issue. Physical healing is one thing, but forgiving this man's sins

is another thing. This action was a blatant attack on the scribes' authority. They were, after all, the ones who interpreted the law and pronounced right from wrong.

The scene ends with the paralyzed man rising up, taking up his bed and going home, to the amazement of all. "When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings." (V8)

What is paralyzed in your life? What are those items that plague you? In this passage, we learn that nothing that we can imagine is impossible with God.

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, for allowing us to bring all of us to you. Thank you, Lord, for accepting our shortcomings and change them into something beautiful. Amen.

October 1 - Psalm 19

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

God's Glory in Creation and the Law

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; ⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Devotion:

I have always thought of Psalm 19 especially in the fall of the year. The thought of cooler temperatures and the promise of leaves changing color is one thought that I will never tire of. The fall also reminds us that the seasons of life change. As the famous old adage goes, if you don't like the weather, don't worry because it will soon change.

Psalm 19 is in its best sense a Psalm about creation and how God's law instructs all of life. As such, verses 1-6 focuses on creation, which could have followed the pattern of an ancient Near East hymn to the sun. These verses state that even the sun is a created object that testifies to the glory and sovereignty of God. So, without uttering a word, the universe bears witness to God's rule and reign. Just as nothing is hid in the bright sunlight, likewise nothing can be hidden from God.

Verses 7-10 contains words that verify that God's instruction is contained in the very structure of the universe. As such, life depends on God's law as much as it depends on the light and warmth of the sun itself. God's law accomplishes what it was set out to accomplish for our lives -- namely wisdom and enlightenment. If we live by God's law, then we can enjoy the reviving of our souls; making us wise; our hearts rejoice; enlightening our eyes; the fear of God produces understanding that God's ordinances are truly righteous and more desired than gold or the sweetness of honey.

Verses 11-14 indicates that God's personal instruction will not be sufficient to ensure that our behavior will be in accord with God. The Psalmist here inserts confession of sin so that he may not only be blameless, but also forgiven. (Blameless does not indicate forgiveness, but to live in dependence upon God.) We learn that dependence upon God is necessary if our words are to be acceptable to God. Thus the sacrifice that is found pleasing to God is the sacrifice of a heart that is humble and lives in dependence upon God.

The Psalm ends in a fashion that is simply astounding -- the God who placed the sun in its course is the same God that the Psalmist has experienced intimately and personally.

Psalm 19 has been referred to as "the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world." The ultimate reality expressed in Psalm 19 is that love is a basic reality. God loved us so much that he provided instruction for humankind -- the law, the Torah. Beyond this thought is the startling reality that the God who created the heavens and the earth is not just a creator, but a forgiving God. God is love, and that love drives the world! Truly an extraordinary concept!

J. Clinton McCann, Jr. writes: "The love that motivated God to create humankind and bear the burden of human disobedience is the same love manifested in the story of Israel, in the life of the Psalmist, and, as Christians profess, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Love is the basic reality of the universe."

Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for loving us, thank you for instructing us and thank you for providing for us, a way to love, ourselves and our neighbors. Amen.