



## Daily Devotionals – September 4 to September 10, 2021

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

### September 4 - Psalm 149

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

#### *Praise for God's Goodness to Israel*

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful. <sup>2</sup> Let Israel be glad in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. <sup>3</sup> Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.

<sup>4</sup> For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory. <sup>5</sup> Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their couches. <sup>6</sup> Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, <sup>7</sup> to execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, <sup>8</sup> to bind their kings with fetters and their nobles with chains of iron, <sup>9</sup> to execute on them the judgment decreed. This is glory for all his faithful ones. Praise the Lord!

#### **Devotion:**

This Psalm begins as a typical song praise of God. Verses 1-3 serve as an invitation to praise God in the presence of the assembly (congregation), while verse 4 lists reasons to join in God's praise.

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful. <sup>2</sup> Let Israel be glad in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. <sup>3</sup> Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre. <sup>4</sup> For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory.

The use of action words spring off the page: Praise, sing, rejoice, and dancing. The Psalmist is attempting to say because God was and is active in the people's lives, then the people should respond in a like manner. The vision in my mind of verses 1-3 is a worship service full of pageantry and celebration. In my mind's eye, I envision the entire assembly (congregation) is joined as one in praise to God. In this scenario, all are engaged and no one is left out of praising God. The people's response to God's mercy is indeed a grand affair. The celebration cannot be too celebratory or lavish, because God has celebrated over his people and lavished his love to them, despite our unworthiness.

The focus switches in verse 5: Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their couches. This is so very far removed from the full throated enthusiasm found in the first four verses. Something has changed, but yet we are not told the name of the change. Especially telling is the change of location – from the assembly to their couch.

The Psalm ends with verses 6-9, which most scholars agree that should not be taken literally. Some believe that these verses were used as a call to arms in the Thirty Years War and continue to incite violence even to this day.

We see a shift in verses 6-9, where the glory that was reserved for Kings has now been moved to God's faithful ones. Here we begin to see a glimpse of future events in God's Kingdom. In essence, the faithful are called to help usher in God's Kingdom in the here and now. I believe it is a high honor to be a part of ushering in God's Kingdom!

This Psalm was written many years ago, but is so relevant to our lives today. How many of us can say that we got super excited when we first accepted Christ as our Savior? There was no limit to what we could do! All of our waking hours were devoted to serving Christ with boundless enthusiasm and passion! But, slowly, something changed. Our desire and passion began to wane, and eventually we left the company of the assembly and simply stayed home. This cycle continued over and over again, until earlier this year when the habit of assembling together to praise God was not an option.

Beloved, it is my sincere prayer that you will not remain on the sidelines once the pandemic is past. It is my sincere prayer that you will use your common sense about when you return to your normal schedule. Many of you might desire to jump into everything all at once, while others will take a more cautious approach. In the meantime, I appreciate the opportunity to share thoughts around our devotions.

In my mind, the same guidelines apply as to inclement weather -- if you feel unsafe or uneasy, don't leave home. Charles and I would much rather you worship and participate from home than taking a chance of infection of Covid.

There is good news in all of this -- our God will remain with us, even in these difficult days.

**Prayer:**

God of eternal faithfulness, thank you for remaining with us no matter what. Amen.

**September 5 - Psalm 119:33-40**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Teach Me Your Way***

33 Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end. 34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

35 Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. 36 Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.

37 Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways. 38 Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.

39 Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good. 40 See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

**Devotion:**

There is a saying about faith that I fancy: "When you become convinced that God loves only the kinds of people you love, and hates all the same people you hate, you can be assured that you have fashioned a god in your own image."

Read this scripture first listening for any hint of arrogance or presumption. I hope you'll hear quite the opposite. It sounds like the voice of one who is searching for a way back toward God. He knows the Law. He is not asking God to teach him more of the commandments.

The psalmist is straining against what has already become a bloated and unwieldy system of "Law" or legalistic faith. Specifically, this is what we refer to as "The Mosaic Law." It ruled Judaism until the time of Christ. By Jesus' time, there weren't just 10 commandments -- there were an estimated 630 laws. He wants to be faithful to God. Trouble is, keeping the impossible tenants of a complex legalistic system was equated to being faithful. If you broke one of these laws, you were regarded as guilty of breaking the entire Law. Therefore, you were not faithful to God.

See how unfulfilling and discouraging that would be? This is the Judeo part of our Judeo-Christian faith between the times of Moses and Christ. So you can hear the exasperation in the voice of the psalmist who wants desperately to be faithful but cannot be within the present system.

Will we bring this kind of faithfulness and loyalty to our Christian practice of faith? Contrary to what you'll hear Christians say, we don't have to search for the will of God like it's a hidden treasure. Our Bible makes clear what God desires of us, especially through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul spent decades pointing out, the tough part is in actually living into what Christ has asked of us.

My high school best friend's sister was only a year behind him. When her first prom came up, she asked her parents what time she needed to be home that night. They responded that they trusted her. She said, "No...give me a curfew please." So they did. Then they asked her why their trust wasn't enough. She responded, "When you give me clear expectations, I feel loved." We have a less legalistic system now in our faith. But in Christ we have clear expectations that can lead us to newness in life!

**Prayer:**

Lord, like the psalmist, help us to find our way toward you. Help us not just to worry about being "saved," but to understand that you wish to grow us in the faith. May we be receptive to your wants. Amen.

**September 6 - Matthew 18:15-20**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Instruction on Disciplining Fairly***

15 "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

**Devotion:**

Have you ever heard of someone being "churched"?

That's terminology we don't use much anymore to describe the painful and ultimate attempt at church discipline: dismissal from membership. It happens so rarely, especially today. The Church (in general) has always attracted a variety of people, including the unhealthy. Some, despite all we might hope, just cannot behave themselves. They cannot bring the emotional or mental health required to live in right relationships within the body of believers.

I can recall only one instance where I had to be involved with such a drastic church action. We had a young man who had begun to criminally stalk a woman also within that church's membership. After one particularly frightening episode where he entered her father's home and refused to leave, we risked losing her if we didn't intervene. We confronted him and encouraged him to get help. But we also pointed out that the restraining order she had taken out included the church. He would have to leave.

In this gospel episode, Jesus is teaching. He is preparing listeners for future life in the fellowships that would result from his ministry among us. Whenever you gather humans, even in Jesus' name, life can get interesting. Right? That's why churches have policies, rules and practices. On hopefully the rarest occasions, someone just can't behave. And their issues are causing such a disruption to the overall fellowship that retaining them simply is not healthy. Moving past a hope for redemption, now the greater good for the greater number of people becomes the need.

How do we avoid that? Jesus lays out for us some guidelines here. Of course, this only takes into account the part we can control. How the individual responds to this process is the variable. Here's my question to ponder: In light of all that we hear in Mt 18:15-17, what do v18-20 contribute? Read it over and listen for the voice of God.

**Prayer:**

God, lead us never to put our own individual agendas and wants ahead of your calling. Nor ahead of the health of the fellowship. Lead us to love your church as you do. Help us commit to the strength of the church, even if sometimes that commitment means difficult work to maintain it. Amen.

**September 7 - 1 Peter 2:11-17**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Live as Servants of God***

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. 12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

13 For the Lord's sake, accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, 14 or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. 17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

**Devotion:**

Are you an *exile*? An *alien*? The quick and easy answer for most of us would be "no." Before you attempt to answer, though, perhaps we should look into the background of our text today in 1 Peter. This letter was written to those exiles living in the *Diaspora*. This was a term used to describe "Jews living among Gentiles." For most, the Diaspora started in the Old Testament. With the fall of both the northern and southern Jewish kingdoms, many either escaped to other countries or were sent away to live elsewhere. Babylon in general and the city of Alexandria in Egypt were two notable places.

In New Testament times, portions of the Jewish exiles continued in those places under Roman rule. However, some Jews had returned home especially to Jerusalem. Now, *diaspora* took on two new meanings. After Christ, new converts to the faith in Jesus were also living "in-between." They were having to carry out their days without their Lord. But, they had a promise of him returning. Then later in the first century, as Rome sacked Jerusalem, countless Jews were dispersed to live elsewhere. Ironically, many of them moved to Rome as an example. Both of these new groups were sometimes referred to as living in the diaspora.

Into that reality comes this letter attributed to Peter. He writes specifically to Christians living in five areas: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. What is he telling them here? In v11-12, he wants them to rise above some of the understandable reactions they may have to being socially bullied for their faith. They were frustrated at an institutionalized culture of hate that threw shade not just their way -- but at anyone who did not affirm the deity of the current Roman ruler, Claudius. To claim faith through God in Christ was to reject that the Emperor was himself God. That was a no-no.

In v13-17, Peter's directive gets a little more specific. It might be within certain of their *freedoms* to resist the authority of the state/religion. But, doing so did not seem worth the price according to Peter. And, it would not make them look very good to do so. He believed that, in the end, the faith was better served by them being good citizens and then living out the free tenets of their faith as a witness to Christ. Sometimes, the things that limit your own perceptions of freedom are not your best reasons to fight authority.

Sometimes, physical ailments can limit or entrap us. We feel like exiles or aliens. Sometimes, a global pandemic causes us to make odd decisions for the greater good. Still, we feel held back. Sometimes, we are living in-between with a job or a circumstance we dislike while awaiting resolution. How we conduct ourselves during our own "diaspora" matters.

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to join the fervency of our faith with your wisdom. Wisdom to discern when to use our freedoms for personal want vs. when to be disciplined enough that restraint is the better option. Help us to be responsible citizens to Caesar as well as to you. Amen.

**September 8 - Deuteronomy 17:2-13**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***If We Take Sin Seriously***

2 If there is found among you, in one of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, and transgresses his covenant 3 by going to serve other gods and worshiping them -- whether the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden -- 4 and if it is reported to you or you hear of it, and you make a thorough inquiry, and the charge is proved true that such an abhorrent thing has occurred in Israel, 5 then you shall bring out to your gates that man or that woman who has committed this crime and you shall stone the man or woman to death. 6 On the evidence of two or three witnesses the death sentence shall be executed; a person must not be put to death on the evidence of only one witness. 7 The hands of the witnesses shall be the first raised against the person to execute the death penalty, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

<sup>8</sup> If a judicial decision is too difficult for you to make between one kind of bloodshed and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another -- any such matters of dispute in your towns -- then you shall immediately go up to the place that the Lord your God will choose, <sup>9</sup> where you shall consult with the Levitical priests and the judge who is in office in those days; they shall announce to you the decision in the case. <sup>10</sup> Carry out exactly the decision that they announce to you from the place that the Lord will choose, diligently observing everything they instruct you. <sup>11</sup> You must carry out fully the law that they interpret for you or the ruling that they announce to you; do not turn aside from the decision that they announce to you, either to the right or to the left. <sup>12</sup> As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the Lord your God, or the judge, that person shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. <sup>13</sup> All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

**Devotion:**

If we take sin seriously, we're supposed to take all of it seriously. Did you realize that? We have people who'd like we preachers to take a tougher stance on sin. But, then they always mean other peoples' sins. Not their own.

To be tough on sin in quite that legalistic a way -- to have a fixation on the need to constantly preach sin and repentance -- that's an Old Testament mindset. So, since this passage came up in the lectionary readings today let's stick with that Old Testament mindset. There were certain sins that brought with them a sentence of death. Here in Deuteronomy 17, this is an example. Later, in chapter 21, they would also be permitted to bring a rebellious son out for stoning. Let that sink in -- you could kill your rebellious kid. But it didn't end there. Adultery, blasphemy (ooo...that's an easier one to commit than you think!), consulting a medium, stealing,

killing another human, doing what is wrong in the sight of the Lord, uttering curses -- you got it. All those and more could get you stoned. Executed. Dead.

How can Christians take seriously the Old Testament notion of right living and being faithful to God? That is, how can people of grace-in-Christ honor the Judeo part of our Judeo-Christian heritage and take sin seriously? The starting place might be to give thanks for forgiveness, repentance and new life made possible in God's own Son.

To give thanks that we don't automatically stone each other these days quite like was evidently permissible in ancient days. That'd be a good thing to reflect on. To consider how easily one could step afoul of one of the Laws back in Mosaic times, and you just might find yourself in some kind of deep trouble. That'd be a good thing to reflect on. Or, we could do what Jesus said to Peter after the resurrection one morning: "Don't worry about John...do what I'm asking YOU to do." That would be a good way to go. By being as humble, faithful and dedicated as we can be, we might best please Christ. Pausing to breathe a sigh of relief that on our worst day - and in our worst sin -- no one has yet pulled out a handful of stones and aimed for us.

Then, leave the rest up to God.

**Prayer:**

Dear God, thank you for Jesus Christ. Now, may we honor him best by living in ways that reflect Him. Worrying less about the unfaithfulness in others and repenting most for our own penchant for sinning. Every last one of us. Amen.

**September 9 - Matthew 21:18-22**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Jesus Curses the Fig Tree***

<sup>18</sup> In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. <sup>19</sup> And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. <sup>20</sup> When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" <sup>21</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. <sup>22</sup> Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive."

**Devotion:**

As the realtor has once said, location, location, location! Location is what sells real estate. The location in the Gospel of Matthew not only sells this passage, but calls us to a higher devotion to God.

The passage immediately preceding this passage (Matthew 21:12-13) helps us to understand today's passage.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and every step brought him closer to the cross. His disciples still did not understand his calling and ministry, but yet, they tried to carry out his instructions. The day seemed pleasant enough until Jesus entered the temple where literally all hell breaks out! Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers, drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple. He had come to clean up the temple and to restore the temple to its intended use -- a house of prayer and not a den of robbers. From there, Jesus leaves town to spend the night in Bethany.

The next day, Jesus is hungry and expects to find figs in a tree full of leaves. When he found the tree was without fruit, he said to the tree, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" (V19b) This is a troubling side of Jesus and one that makes us uncomfortable. We are all happy with the Jesus who heals and loves and supports, but the moment that Jesus' actions do not conform to our idea, then we are out of sorts. Why?

Many of us have Jesus all wrapped in a nice box with a bow on it. We have done this because we want a Jesus that we know and can manipulate. In other words, we want Jesus at *our* convenience, to act in a way that we approve of and to only act in the manner that we understand. But friends, that is not the way that God works.

In this passage, Jesus acts as the pruner -- if a tree does not contain fruit, it must be pruned, or in this case wither and die. The message is clear for churches and for individuals -- full foliage does not equate to bearing fruit. Emmanuel Y. Lartey, professor of pastoral theology, care and counseling at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, states "The challenge for the church is to not only be an advertisement for the gospel, but actively to bear fruit delivering what is promised." What a tall order we have to live up to!

But Jesus is so much more than our expectations. Jesus, who has all authority at his disposal, elects to display his power by curing of the sick and all creation. Because of his obedience to God, Jesus chooses personal suffering so that he might secure salvation for all. He demonstrates that his power is to be used to fulfill the purpose of God. This is how ultimate power operates -- ultimate power makes choices that are in alignment with the divine will and always for the benefit and well-being of humanity.

What can we learn from the fig tree? Perhaps the lesson that we need to learn is this: What motivation do we need to become the fruit bearing followers of Jesus Christ?

**Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, help us as we seek to become fruit-bearing followers of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**September 10 - 1 John 3:11-16**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Love One Another***

<sup>11</sup> For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. <sup>12</sup> We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. <sup>13</sup> Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. <sup>16</sup> We know love by this that he laid down his life for us -- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

**Devotion:**

Sometimes we need a course correction, and the same thing is true of the church. The church needs to be reminded of primary things, namely that we should love one another. Following this statement, the author includes a brief explanation going all the way back to Cain and Abel. We read in Genesis 4 the story of Cain and Abel, sons of Adam and Eve. Cain, the first born was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. As required, both made sacrifices to God, but God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. Cain was furious and that fury and hatred resulted in Abel's murder by Cain. Following Abel's murder, Cain was punished by God and was condemned to a life of wandering and then dwelt in the land of Nod.

Following this opening introduction and recalling of their shared history, the writer then moves to some of the more sinister aspects of human nature. The case is reviewed in some detail: Cain murdered Abel because Abel's deeds were righteous and Cain's were not. From that point, the writer continues down a disturbing path -- everyone who hates a brother or sister are murderers and God's love does not dwell in them. Even though believers know they are hated by the world, they are not to hate others. This is contrary to all human emotion, yet the command is quite clear: "All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life in them." (V15) If our natural response is skewed, how are we to respond? We have the example of Jesus that laid down his life for us, and we should lay down our lives for one another.

What is our takeaway from this passage? First we should be appalled by violence wherever and whenever it happens. Today's society appears to shoot first and ask questions later. Without taking sides on the gun debate, we can venture down the path that leads to murdering others. The writer states that murder begins with a heart that is full of hatred. Hatred is not compatible with the law of love. The law of love searches for the best in others. The law of love does not judge. The law of love demands the very best that we have to offer. Isaac Watts states this principle this way, the love of Jesus Christ for us demands our soul, our lives, and our all. Responding with our all can mean only one thing -- the same love that Christ had for us is the very same love that we should have for each other.

Knowing and understanding a concept is far different than applying those concepts to our lives. How can we accomplish this? We begin fresh and new every morning thanking God for God's love and mercy. We begin each day by attempting to see others through the lens of love. We begin each day by putting one foot in front of the other and praying that today will be different. "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us -- and we ought to lay down our lives for each other." (V16)

**Prayer:**

Loving God, assist us to grow in our love for you and also for each other. Amen.