



Daily Devotionals – November 27 to December 3, 2021

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

November 27 - Zechariah 14:1-9

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Future Warfare and Final Victory

¹⁴ See, a day is coming for the Lord, when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your midst. ² For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses looted and the women raped; half the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. ³ Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day, his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward.

⁵ And you shall flee by the valley of the Lord's mountain, for the valley between the mountains shall reach to Azal; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

⁶ On that day there shall not be either cold or frost. ⁷ And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light.

⁸ On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter.

⁹ And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one.

Devotion:

This section opens with God gathering the nations in Jerusalem for what is most certainly a disaster. What constitutes this disaster? The disaster is the terms of the conflict, war spoils are taken from Jerusalem and divided. (Such is the prerogative of the victorious army.) This account is described in vivid detail -- the city will be captured, the houses plundered and the women raped. Following that the city will be divided with half of the city going into exile while the other half remains. There is no reason stated as to why some people are exiled and others not. The account does not indicate any cause for the destruction of Jerusalem, only that it happened.

But, the good news in all of this is that God has a plan. God's plan is to restore to those who have been damaged their fortunes, which will be far greater because they are God's fortunes!

This chapter does indicate the complete reordering of social, political and the cosmic world on Yahweh's day. On this day, Yahweh will be universally revered, and day and night will not be needed anymore because they become one continuous light. New divisions appear: The population of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives will be portioned into two divisions, and a freshwater stream will appear. All of this occurs because the city is preparing for the holiness that will soon characterize Jerusalem.

The event that reorders the cosmos also ends the pattern of day and night, cold and heat as long as the earth endures. The river that flows out of Jerusalem will be split in two -- half flowing to the Mediterranean Sea and the other half flowing into the Dead Sea.

What does this passage teach us today?

Though today may appear bleak, God always has the last word.

Why doubt the God who even the cosmos obeys?

One day, the Lord our God will become king over all the earth.

Prayer:

Ever-present God, teach us to trust in you, even when our outlook seems the bleakest. Amen.

November 28 - Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Restore Us, O God

1 Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.

3 Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

4 How long, Lord God Almighty, will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

6 You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us.

7 Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

17 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

18 Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

19 Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

Devotion:

With this week of devotions, we enter Advent. This is normally one of my favorite times of the year for obvious reasons. The anticipation, goodness and cheer of the season abounds. Then, at its culmination, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord! This odd year of 2020 will not change that.

Let me say it this way: Don't let 2020 change that for you. Whether you are worshipping with us virtually online, or reading these devotions, hold fast to the power and hope of Advent. Be loyal to your church. Hold fast to your church as well. We'll get through this thing together if we stay together.

Some Christians hear the birth pangs of Advent as far back as the Psalms. V1-3 do give us a flavor of a repentant and hopeful psalmist as he begs God for mercy and presence. Listen to what he asks for there --

1 Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us. 3 Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

That sounds an awful lot like what we hear and celebrate during the Advent season. We celebrate a God who has looked upon an imperfect people with mercy. A God who has sent a Son to live among us. A Son who has

loved and healed us, who has taught and shown us how to live, and then who laid down his very life for us at Calvary.

We sold my mother-in-law's car last week, as I write this. Actually, it once belonged to Elizabeth. We bought it new, but now it is eighteen years old. Though it was well cared for, it needed a good cleaning inside and out. One morning before we delivered it to the new owner, we both worked on it. She vacuumed and shined the inside up while I concentrated on all the trim and tires outside. Painstakingly, we restored the appearance of the car until it looked almost new.

That word "restore" shines through to us in this psalm. If God is to restore us, we are to be made sound once again. But we also are to be made over so that we resemble what we used to. So that we look like what we were made to be. That is the invitation the psalmist gives to God. Will you give God that invitation to restore you this Advent season?

Prayer:

Lord, if we have prayed to you for Salvation, then now we beg you for presence and restoration. Help us to peel off the layers of our living, so that we resemble what you made us to be. We give ourselves to the God of Advent, that we might become new creatures again. Amen.

November 29 - 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

by Dr. Charles Qualls

God is Faithful

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,
5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind -- 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you -- 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Devotion:

God is faithful. These next few days, that would be a good theme to let run through your spirit. That theme is the hope of our pre-Christmas days.

Advent is beginning, thus our focus on ancient promises kept by our Creator. This particular scripture text draws from an interesting perspective. The apostle Paul has something to say about unity around thankfulness for God's *abundance*. That's his word. God has given much in Jesus Christ. God strengthens and keeps us in Jesus.

Paul's burden was that every Christian would know their God better. Advent gives us that chance. He also strived so that every church would grow stronger and healthier by applying the model of Christ to its fellowship. Today, we have far greater religious diversity and freedom in our nation. We are blessed relative to other parts of the world and other eras of history. However, Christianity still endures its challenges. Particularly, we may each gravitate toward the divisive presence of "idols" that are not all that obvious in our modern lives.

Here was the challenge at Corinth. Apparently some of the members of the community were using their God-given gifts as instruments of power and division. They were flexing their spiritual muscles and trying to manipulate their way into prominence. I've seen it in every church I've served. How about you? Competitiveness can destroy unity in a friendship, a company, a marriage and within a church. Paul called

upon them to focus on the short time they had to serve in Christ. To use their gifts for the kingdom so that Jesus' return would find them faithful.

What unifies folks at our church? What helps you to stay focused on healthier pursuits in church? This Advent, may we be conscious of what we are doing. May we use our worship and study time to learn more about God in Christ. May our loyal and dedicated participation in what our church offers lead to the strengthening of our fellowship, as well. God has been faithful to save us, to call us and to give the gifts we'll need for the calling.

Prayer:

Lord, we acknowledge that the gift of Christ was given to us as you looked upon us and saw need. You have been faithful to your promise to provide. Now, may we be faithful to your church and to you. Amen.

November 30 - Psalm 79
by Dr. Charles Qualls
The Flock of Your Pasture

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

2 They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth.

3 They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

4 We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

5 How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?

6 Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name.

7 For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

8 Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low.

9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake.

10 Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes.

11 Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power preserve those doomed to die.

12 Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors the taunts with which they taunted you, O Lord!

13 Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

Devotion:

"Boy, you sure are growing up fast!" For a country boy of the 60s and 70s, nothing was music to my ears quite like hearing someone say that. It was probably the most welcomed comment someone could make. I wanted to be as grown up as I could be, and to be grown up as fast as I could be. I wanted to be a big boy.

Jesus grew up, too. You know?

We are entering the season when we wait for the birth of our Lord. We have a Manger on our minds. We see swaddling cloths (they were *cloths*, not *clothes* evidently) and Heavenly Angels through the eyes of our spirits. We are gazing at the glow of our Christmas trees in the dim of a dark night and awaiting any hint of the Christ child's magic.

But the Christ of Advent didn't stay a baby. Will we let the baby grow up? He was brought here to be the very grown up Jesus he became. That's the longing expressed here in Psalm 79. We hear the groans of a nation, and perhaps even a world, that desperately hoped for God's touch.

Today, here is what I hope we can spend a moment focusing on --

Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

There in verse 13, we catch a glimpse of the calling that Christ answered for humanity on that first Christmas. Later, Luke 2 tells us there were (of all things) *shepherds* out in the fields that night. They were tending their flocks. They were the very first to hear the news that Jesus Christ had arrived. To hear of a promised Messiah who had long been called for. Later, the fully grown Jesus took up their humble mantle and pronounced himself to be for us, "The Good Shepherd." The sheep of his flock are supposed to know his voice. They are protected by him, and kept in sight by him. If we stray, he will pursue us. This is the care of the promised One.

Now he is delivered in Advent glory, right before us. Use these days to tune your ear. For the cooing of a baby will one day turn to the strong voice of your Good Shepherd!

Prayer:

Lord, even now may we humble ourselves and listen for you. You may come to us as a helpless child, but soon we will be under your care. You are the Good Shepherd, and we need your guiding ways and your saving grace. Amen.

December 1 - Micah 4:6-13

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Restoration Promised After Exile

6 In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted.

7 The lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore.

8 And you, O tower of the flock, hill of daughter Zion, to you it shall come, the former dominion shall come, the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem.

9 Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in labor?

10 Writhe and groan, O daughter Zion, like a woman in labor; for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies.

11 Now many nations are assembled against you, saying, "Let her be profaned, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion."

12 But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.

13 Arise and thresh, O daughter Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples, and shall devote their gain to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.

Devotion:

One of the finest sermons I can recall hearing was by Dr. Roy Honeycutt, and it was entitled "Hope On the Other Side of Despair." Isn't that what the first Christmas was all about? For centuries, Israel had cried out for God's delivery. They knew they had messed up, at least many of the leaders understood. God was disappointed with them, and left them to the natural and cyclical digression that any nation can undergo if it becomes distracted.

The turn of the pages in your Bible between the Old and New Testaments represents over 400 years of real history. History of this little nation, once a chosen people. Having been conquered and exiled, Israel was now partly resettled at home. But they were occupied and under the iron-fisted control of the Holy Roman Empire as Jesus showed up.

The minor prophet Micah speaks to us this day. His prophecy gave voice to God's promises. But they were promises that would not be acted upon just yet. Israel would suffer yet more for her sins. God's chosen people had chosen to largely abandon God. They had been anything other than a city set upon a hill, the model of what human creation could be. So, now they longed desperately for deliverance.

Read these words from Micah carefully today. Hear the tone of a future, struck for them by a God who has heard their cry. A promise aimed for a people who have all but lost the ability to see any future at all. Jesus' message we call the "Beatitudes" can be hinted at here, with God giving attention to a humbled, broken people. V13 culminates with the language of military might and even a wealth of sorts.

Here was a message of hope that we Christians hear as fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. But that hope would come after their time of despair. They were not done waiting nor suffering. I think most of us have lived seasons of life where we, too, were so enveloped by despair that hope was hard to find. If that is you this year, don't give up. God is still at work, bringing about a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Prayer:

Lord, this Advent we do not know your thoughts. We do not understand your plans. But we do know that for some of us, life sure has exiled us into a foreign land. Grant us patience and openness, that we might wait upon you for deliverance that we know not of just yet. Amen.

December 2 - Micah 5:1-5

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Restoration Promised After Exile

5 Now you are walled around with a wall; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the ruler of Israel upon the cheek.

The Ruler from Bethlehem

² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; ⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil, we will raise against them seven shepherds and eight installed as rulers.

Devotion:

Our selected passage is very familiar to us, because it is often read and heard during the Advent and Christmas seasons. When questioned by Herod, the wise men quote Micah 5:2, perhaps the most famous verse in this tiny book. Bethlehem is David's hometown, and from her the Messiah will come. In a land that was actively looking for the Messiah, texts such as Micah 5:2 encouraged the people's expectation.

This passage also includes mention of Ephrathah which makes a double connection with David, including both the geographic location and family identification. What is clear is this -- when God is about to do something great, human estimates of size and status, power and influence are completely irrelevant. In fact, God often chooses someone that we would dismiss as the most unlikely candidate for carrying out God's mission.

This new ruler will subordinate himself to the true ruler of Israel. Because he will depend totally on God, he will make certain that the people dwell securely. No other power, even to the ends of the earth, will be able to contend against a nation that is led by such a king. This new ruler will stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord. God identifies with the Shepherd in Micah, just as David was a shepherd who not only tended his father's sheep but also served as the model king of Israel.

This new king is most likely Jesus because Christians have long associated this text with the birth of Jesus. What is not clear is this -- is this speaking about Jesus' birth, or of Jesus' return? Christians have claimed this passage for millennia, but can a portion of scripture that is addressed to a specific people in ancient times speak to us today? Of course Micah was not speaking to us today, but our questions are similar to those raised by us today.

What does Micah say to us in today's pandemic? Micah offers us a word of warning and a glimmer of hope beyond these troubled days. The Spirit continues to work in communities of faithful people. And as such, new understandings of God's will for us in our time and place are possible. We will no doubt see things that the original author never saw, but they may, in fact, be a word from God.

Prayer:

God of wonder, we continue to be surprised by your word to us. Help us to believe what we read. Amen.

December 3 - Hosea 6:1-6
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
A Call to Repentance

⁶ "Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up.

² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

³ Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth."

Impenitence of Israel and Judah

⁴What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.

⁵Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

⁶For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Devotion:

The opening verses (1-3) form an interesting positive outlook surrounded by negative judgements (5:15-6:3). In verse 1, Hosea summons the people to return to the Lord. This is in response to the threats and insults found in Chapter 5. The great king is not the one who can heal them and bandage their wounds; because only God is capable, available and ready to act on their behalf.

The first three verses are important because of their resurrection theology. The choice of words is interesting: "he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (1b-2). This passage can be interpreted in multiple ways, but there is a lot of support for the interpretation that this passage refers to the covenantal resurrection of the body from the dead. This passage reminds us that God is in control over all the earth. God is as certain as the morning sun and as the refreshing rains. This God of the Hebrew people is a God who is beyond our words and cannot be explained by them.

The next section begins with a description of two rebellious nations, Ephraim and Judah. What is clear is that the soul that needs healing has a two-part process: Repentance and faith. Repentance indicates that the soul turns to God, recognizing its own sinfulness and need of salvation. While not always clear, repentance implies faith -- faith in God that God is able to forgive their sin and restore them to faith.

Today, the world is out of sorts with the effect of Covid-19. People are catching this virus without even knowing it. People are suffering from the loss of fellowship with friends and family. People are suffering from all the unknowns in life today, because nothing is as it should be. Even church is different because we sit socially distanced and wear our masks. I hate it that we cannot sing carols during Advent and Christmas. I hate it that we will worship using a hybrid service -- without singing, without litanies, and without candle lighting.

Yes, this is a different time, but we need to remember that there is good news even in the midst of Covid-19. The good news is this -- God still loves us and desires to provide for our needs. The good news is this -- God still redeems our lives that are so mixed up. The good news is this -- even in the pandemic, God's love cannot be silenced.

Prayer:

God of infinite patience, please restore us to the joy of our salvation. Amen.