

"Continue" – at a time when many believers were being persecuted for their faith, the original readers had a good record of supporting prisoners, who were reliant on outside help for food and necessities.

4 Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

"Pure" – the original readers were Christians of Jewish origin living outside Palestine, surrounded by all the influences of Greek culture and its notoriously lax morality.

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

"Free" – Christians are called to be free to love God and love others, not bound by the love of money, position or ambition. A mark of maturity is being content in trusting God for His provision – the antidote to living as a captive to selfish desires.

6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

"With confidence" – the word conveys being bold and courageous, followed by the quotation from Ps. 118:6. The context is a mocking and persecuting culture.

7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome

of their way of life and imitate their faith.

"Remember" – both living and former leaders, who evangelised and instructed well, authoritative because of their faithfulness to the word of God.

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

"The same yesterday... today... forever" – Jesus who was at the beginning, incarnate for a time on earth and will be presiding over the end. The faith of those renowned leaders was in an unchanging Lord and His unchanging message.

15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

"Sacrifice of praise" – a phrase found in the psalms meaning bringing joy to God by verbal praise and thanksgiving. NT believers are all priests according to 1 Peter 2:5 and 9 and the offering of sacrifice now is not bringing God our animals or grain, nor a re-enactment of Jesus' once-for-all self sacrifice, but freely giving joyful praise and thanks to God, Romans 12:1.

16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

"Such sacrifices" – as well as praise and thanksgiving our giving to God's pleasure is seen in doing what He would have us do and being generous to others.

IN PRACTICE Jesus remains unchanging. So does the way of life He gives us, although everything else around us is shifting and evolving. It's hard not to let the fundamental message of Jesus be trimmed and shaved by our changing values. It's good to be broad-minded and accepting of others – but not if it erodes what we believe. Leaders of faith are remembered because of their unswerving trust of God, not their political correctness. This passage exhorts us to "keep on loving" with the sense of keeping the faith as well, and gives us seven instances: hospitality to those not known to us, identifying with those who have lost their freedom, protecting marriage, trusting God rather than the security of money, saying 'no' to fears that crowd in, and 'yes' to godly leaders who lead out, and especially honouring Jesus as Lord. A tall order? Remember that this passage was written to Spirit-filled Christians, for whom living their faith was much more difficult than for us. But we have the help of the same Helper – as much as we ask Him.

QUESTION Which of the challenges listed is relatively easy? And which are the hardest?

PRAYER Father God, as I come to you in Jesus, this study makes me aware of how much I rely on 'me' and how fickle my trust of You really is. Show me where the living water is, to drink from, and keep on drinking, empowered to live and worship in touch with this present world, yet as one set apart for You. In Jesus I pray, Amen.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, September 1, 2019, with commentary notes

A Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, Sept 1**

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: How readily we seek our own salvation rather than trusting God

Jeremiah 2:4-13 – The pride of self sufficiency condemned

Proverbs 25:6-7 – The danger of thinking we're something we're not

Luke 14:1, 7-14 – Jesus says that presumption has eternal consequences

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 – Exhortation to keep loving, in both attitude and action

And also: Psalm 81:1, 10-16

Jeremiah 2:4-13 – The pride of self sufficiency condemned

A muddy residue is no substitute for fresh living water

4 Hear the word of the LORD, you descendants of Jacob, all you clans of Israel.

"Hear" – in prophetic writing, summoning God's people to hear His instruction or judgment.

5 This is what the LORD says: "What fault did your ancestors find in Me, that they strayed so far from Me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.

"Worthless" – Jeremiah's trademark way of describing idolatrous worship. Instead of being set apart to God who had delivered them and led them, they had devalued their covenant with Him and become worthless themselves.

6 They did not ask, 'Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land of drought and utter darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?'

"Did not ask" – they quickly forgot God's goodness to them.

7 I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.

"Fertile" – Hebr. karmel, the opposite of a desert and also the name of a fertile area around an upland range associated with Elijah, 1 Kings 18.

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8 The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who deal with the law did not know Me; the leaders rebelled against Me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.

"Priests... leaders... prophets" – priests' primary responsibility was to teach the law together with prophets proclaiming God's way and shepherds, leaders who governed. All were leading people astray through their own lack of relationship with God.

9 "Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the LORD. "And I will bring charges against your children's children.

10-11 Cross over to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this. Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But My people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.

"My people have exchanged" – Israel's demise into faithlessness was irrational, and not seen in Western cultures (Cyprus) or Eastern ones (Kedar).

12 Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD.

"Be appalled... you heavens" – the Lord calls heaven to witness the breaking of the covenant, which heaven had seen agreed, Deut. 30:19; 31:28.

13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns,

broken cisterns that cannot hold water. "Broken cisterns" – a running spring known as "living water" was a precious source in a dry country. Household cisterns in the limestone lined

with plaster to store the infrequent rainfall, but they frequently cracked leaving only sludge – a picture of the futility of false man-made religion compared with the fountain of living water which is God.

IN PRACTICE What Jeremiah railed against, rightly, was the ease with which his fellow Israelites had shrugged off their history and worst of all, their allegiance to God through His covenant. It's a lesson to us of how easily we go back on the demands of maintaining a relationship with God and substitute the easier routines of empty religion. This, says Jeremiah, is like trying to survive by drinking slimy rainwater instead of going to the spring to draw from its fresh flow.

QUESTION *Is keeping up a relationship with God demanding - or a source of joy and strength? What in us makes it seem too hard work?*

Proverbs 25:6-7 – The danger of thinking we're something we're not

Presumption is not a way to gain a king's ear

6 Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among his great men;

"Claim a place" – in the royal court, the procession order, and the proximity to the throne when in attendance, were prized symbols of status.

IN PRACTICE Honour and shame were prized and feared, respectively, in the ancient world. Are we so different? Our faltering self-esteem and lack of assurance about who we are in God's sight can make us try too hard to be something we are not. God, of course, will see through that sham in no time. It's better to know that we have a place at court – and then know we have nothing to prove.

• **For further study**, see Psalm 110:1, Matt. 26:64, Mark 10:35-37, Hebrews 1:13.

7 It is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before his nobles.

"Better" – the wise path to gain an audience with the king is to practice humility. Arrogant presumption leads to shame.

Luke 14:1, 7-14 – The eternal consequences of our status seeking

Our social ambitions deny the justice of the kingdom of God

1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, He was being carefully watched.

"Jesus went to eat" – a guest of a leading person in the community as the renowned teacher who would speak – and perhaps be trapped into saying something against Jewish law.

7 When He noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, He told them this parable:

"Places of honour" – the quality of food depended on where you sat, your place in the social order. This pride of place was also played out at the Last Supper and confronted by Jesus

• **For further study**, Luke 22:24-27, John 13:12-15.

8-9 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

"When someone invites you" – Jesus uses a parable based on Proverbs 25:6-7 (above) to make two points, the self-excluding barrier that pride creates, and our preparation for the eternal invitation to be extended by God at the end time.

10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all the other guests.

"Your host... will say" – the lesson points to God, who honours those who, recognising unworthiness in themselves, rely solely on His mercy

11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

"Those who exalt... those who humble themselves – the principle of reversal which is repeated throughout the Bible.

• **For further study**, see Luke 11:43, 18:14, 20:46; 2 Chron. 7:14-15; Prov. 3:34, 25:6-7; Matt 18:4, 23:12; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6.

12 Then Jesus said to His host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.

"Do not invite... your rich neighbours" – inviting

IN PRACTICE The gospel is all about recognising the enormity of what Jesus has done for us, and so being free from the human desire to do saving or exalting things for ourselves. The typical banquet described here, where Jesus was invited by a rich and prominent Pharisee, was all about the social distinctions of who sat where. People used the occasion to cement – or improve – their position in society. Jesus told them a parable based on a well-known saying in Proverbs and said: "Don't do this." We start off doing things for our own reward – a kind of creating our own 'salvation', like the folly that Jeremiah was pointing out. Only a personal relationship with God can free us from that need – and then we are positioned to be generous-hearted towards those that cannot pay us back.

QUESTION *It's one we come back to again and again - how free am I from prejudice and judgment against others less fortunate?*

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 – Keep loving, in both attitude and action

How God is pleased by the various ways of brotherly love

1 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

"Keep on loving" – now follows seven evidences of the love of God flowing, concluding with the unshakeable faith of leaders in the unchanging good news of Jesus, vv.7-8.

2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

"Show hospitality" – to people in the wider

an honoured guest carried the expectation that they would invite you back, raising your social status. But God extends an invitation to all sinful people to join Him at His banquet table of salvation.

• **For further study**, see this in the context of Luke 14:1-24 as a whole.

13-14 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

"Invite... the crippled... the blind" – these people were excluded from the Temple.

"The resurrection of the righteous" – those who respond to the gospel, Luke 20:35-36, and are declared righteous on the basis of what Jesus has done for them in His atoning death, Romans 8:1-4.

Christian community, not personally known to them. First-century travellers greatly valued this kind of accommodation, as travel was difficult and inns could be dangerous, Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; 1 Peter 4:9.

"To strangers... to angels" – Abraham, Gideon and Manoah were all honoured for offering hospitality to angels without knowing it

• **For further study**, see Genesis 18, Judges 6 and 13.

3 Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.