

"Who wants all people to be saved" – God's desire is our salvation and He extends the offer to all, but both Jesus and Paul teach clearly that only those who believe in Christ will receive salvation. Christ died for all, but our response is needed: to repent, believe and trust Him with our lives, to receive the benefits of that sacrifice.

5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

"One mediator... Christ Jesus" – the bridge between the invisible and all-holy God and people

IN PRACTICE Being trustworthy with what God has given us is more than giving Jesus the lordship of our lives and possessions. We can't underestimate the importance of this step, and the life-changing result. Paul is writing to Timothy and the church in Ephesus, not at the time of Jesus but after His resurrection and the empowering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Timothy's community is alternative, counter-cultural and therefore persecuted. It is also a community of ordinary men and women with no church hierarchy and no priests to do the work for them. They share the priesthood as the believers they are, all empowered to come before God, to pray and to assert His kingdom will (as in the words of the Lord's Prayer). All are called to engage spiritually, aware that what we see happening on earth starts in the heavenlies, and to change the course of events through prayer. The heavenly dimension is where believers have the influence. The "trustworthy" dimension is whether we use it or not. At times of political turmoil, no one on earth seems to have the answers – but heaven does. At times when there is such a gap between rich and poor and families need food banks and other support, politicians struggle to find answers, but heaven has justice to be called down. The "people in authority" in Paul and Timothy's world were the ones seizing and killing Christians: who would want to bless such people? Yet Paul urges the believers in Ephesus, led by Timothy, to use the spiritual authority given to them and make it a priority to pray for the very people they had least affinity with. The result would be God's goodness and peace known by all. The spiritual authority we have been given as believers we hold as those entrusted with it, to pray and see God's kingdom order come, bit by bit.

QUESTION *Politics by definition divides and polarises, but as Christians we have a unity that rises above what we may think is best, and a way of bringing change far more powerful than the ballot box. As spiritually empowered people, how should we be exercising that to bring beneficial change?*

PRAYER Lord, we deserve judgment for the many ways we have lived by our priorities and ignored Yours. Yet Your grace is such that You show us constant mercy – and encourage us to rediscover our partnership with You and use well what we have. Help us now to pray and bless those who are in positions of authority, and to own our spiritual responsibility for their guidance in taking wise decisions. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TLW38 The Bible version is the 2011 revision of the New International Version © Biblica, which was a completely new translation in 1978

seeking Him. Most people start off trying to find God themselves, before finding the route of humbly accessing Him through Christ Jesus. Similarly, the false teachers lacked understanding of Jesus and the salvation which is in Him alone.

7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

"Appointed a herald and an apostle" – an apostle is sent as an envoy; a herald is a proclaimer with royal authority. Paul confronts the false teachers' exclusivity that discouraged the Ephesians from praying for their Gentile wider community.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, September 22, 2019, with commentary notes

A Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, Sept 22**
Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: Showing ourselves trustworthy with what God has given us

Amos 8:4-7 – Betraying God's trust has consequences
with Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

Luke 16:1-13 – The greedy steward saved by giving up all his profits

1 Timothy 2:1-7 – The priority of using our gifts to support good government

Also read: Psalm 79:1-9, Psalm 113

Amos 8:4-7 – Going against the covenant is a costly mistake

Disregard for God's law and values will bring His judgment

reference to Israel's overweening pride in its imagined strength and wealth, see Amos 6:8.

4 Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land...

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

Now the exile is a reality

"You who trample the needy" – the rich and therefore powerful who were oppressing the poor were to "hear this" word of judgment.

18 You who are my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me.

"Faint" in Scripture is sickness from great sorrow. Jeremiah felt the burden of his message keenly.

5 ...saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" – skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales...

19 Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?"

"Why have they aroused My anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?"

"New Moon... and... Sabbath be ended" – corrupt merchants, using dishonest weights and giving short measure, were impatient for the markets to open again after the monthly and weekly closures so that they could add to their profits.

"Is the Lord not in Zion?" – say the people, still perplexed at God allowing the loss of His land and temple. "Why have they..." is God's reply.

6 ...buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

20 "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved."

"Harvest is past... we are not saved" – proverbial saying about a poor harvest meaning famine to come. The people are not saved because (it is inferred) they are not faithful.

"Buying the poor" – as well as contempt for the Sabbath, merchants were enslaving people for small debts and selling sweepings in with the grain.

21 Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me.

7 The LORD has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: "I will never forget anything they have done.

"My people are crushed" – the deportations to Babylon started 20 years before the final fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah identifies deeply with his people's suffering, but sees only doom.

"The pride of Jacob" – an ironic double meaning, God swearing by Himself and also by a second

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22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?

"No balm in Gilead" – small evergreen trees in the hills east of the Jordan river oozed a resin sought after for its medicinal properties. The people are consulting the wrong 'physicians', deceitful prophets, Jer. 8:11-12, who were saying "peace" when there was no peace.

IN PRACTICE God is gracious, treating us not as we deserve, but generously! But the catch - if you can call it that - is that He expects us to be the same with others. He is love, and full of mercy, and that doesn't leave much scope for us to show harsh attitudes or dishonesty to others. Where our attitudes are making life harder for others, rather than us doing what is in our power to help them, we should expect God's judgment. It may be slow in coming - plenty of opportunity to put things right - as Amos' warning came a century and a half before Jeremiah saw the terrible exile. *The principle is clear: we are responsible stewards of all that God has given us.*

QUESTION *Are life principles from the Old Testament relevant for us today?*

Luke 16:1-13 – The greedy steward saved by giving up all his profits

A worldly character gives up what he has for a future; how much more should we!

1 Jesus told His disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.

"His disciples" – perhaps more than the twelve commissioned as apostles, including others like the 72 also sent out on mission, Luke 10:1, 72.

2 So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

"Give an account" – needed by the new steward.

3-4 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg - I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

"What shall I do now?" – ancient culture put a high value on honour, and favour shown was favour reciprocated. Other 'houses' or estates might seek a steward who was adept in the ways of business.

5-6 "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

9:1 Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.

"A fountain of tears" – the 'weeping prophet' was both angered by his people's deceit, treachery, adultery and idolatry, but also keenly aware that he was one of them. Jesus, recognising Jerusalem's rejection, had similar feelings, Matt. 23:37.

"Three thousand litres of olive oil," he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifteen hundred.'

"Take your bill" – charging interest on delayed payment was prohibited, Leviticus 25:36-37, but a steward would add a substantial commission for profit and contingency, giving scope to drop the price and secure the net payment for the master.

7 "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

"Thirty tons of wheat," he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it twenty-four.'

"Thirty tons of wheat" – the yield of about 100 acres and worth up to ten years' wages for a day labourer. The different reduction reflects the different margins on each commodity.

8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

"He had acted shrewdly" – if dishonestly in the level of profit he was extracting. The ways of

business in the ancient world may not sit well with us, but Jesus was teaching the value of sacrifice now, for reward in eternity. If the worldly farm manager could sacrifice his profit in a time of crisis, how much more should we as people of the light surrender all, to follow Jesus.

• **For further study**, Jn 12:36, Eph. 5:8, 1 Thess 5:5.

9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

"Use worldly wealth" – not that we can in any way buy or earn entrance into heaven: the opposite is consistently and strongly emphasised by Jesus. Here He teaches that our stewardship is a measure of our relationship with God.

10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

"Little... much" – material possessions contrasted with the true riches (v.11) of a heavenly eternity.

IN PRACTICE The lesson on trustworthy stewardship continues with Jesus' parable story about an estate manager whose sharp practice got him dismissed. Yet this man knew what to do. He knew that sacrificing what he had gained now, would give him a secure future. If this dishonest man, within the questionable business practice of the time, could sacrifice what he had gained and get a reprieve from judgment and a new start, how much more will our sincere sacrifice of self before God be rewarded. This man laid down his gains. How much more will our laying down our lives, and all that is precious in them, give us the life which God, in His generosity, wants for us - which starts now with kingdom life.

QUESTION *Was Jesus condoning sharp business, or was He showing Himself to be involved with the world and an engaged Redeemer of it?*

1 Timothy 2:1-7 – We must use our gifts to support decision makers

Knowing Jesus is salvation but also the means of seeing others saved

2-3 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

"Petitions... be made for all people" – i.e. "all kinds of people", not just other believers and even enemies, Luke 6:27-28. Paul is also confronting the

11-12 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

"Have... been trustworthy" – teaching a lesson about being trustworthy stewards of all that God gives us: money, possessions and spiritual gifts.

• **For further study** which develops this teaching, see Luke 19:11-26.

13 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

"Cannot serve both" – following on from the "trustworthy" challenge, the question of the place money has, in a life that trusts God and serves Him.

• **For further study**, see Matt. 6:24; James 4:4.

Judaising, exclusive and separatist teaching going around in Ephesus.

"Petitions... intercession and thanksgiving" – all kinds of prayer and worship: supplications which focus on personal need, intercessions coming before God freely and with confidence to make bold requests, and thanksgiving praising God for what He has done.

3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.