

hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

"Take hold" – Paul urges Timothy to live beyond reproach and free from a false sense of entitlement. Timothy had the assurance of eternal life in Christ and had declared this, probably at his baptism but living in salvation is an active (and spiritually contested) pursuit.

13-16 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time – God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen.

IN PRACTICE Ephesus was a wealthy city and apart from the land and property owners, there was a prosperous middle class growing made up of of ship owners, merchants and tradesmen. The general well-being evidently affected how the believers thought and acted, and some of those doing the teaching in the network of house churches saw opportunity for a bit of self-promotion and reward. It should have been a call by God and a desire to serve Him. Instead of modelling the new life of Jesus and His kingdom, they were sliding into the beliefs and values of their Greek-Roman culture and losing the distinctives of righteousness, faith, love and gentleness. We, too, can quickly lose what is distinctive about the good news of Jesus Christ. Our lives and values easily become blurred and compromised. Even the church of Jesus Christ can easily become an institution that, like Timothy's situation, is losing its focus on Jesus and His teaching, losing the desire to listen to Scripture as in the parable, besieged and unable to hear God's mouthpieces as in the time of Jeremiah. We need to recapture the heavenly perspective; faith is under attack as never before and although the victory is already recorded, we have to do our part and fight the good fight for righteousness, godliness, love and endurance.

QUESTION *Is the issue we see around us just the love of money - or does that also include status, control and power? What does Jesus want from us?*

PRAYER Lord, so much has been lost in the way of simple godliness, and in a consumer age we find contentment in the face of all the choices a struggle. Help us to so draw close to You, that the things that try to draw us away, lose their attraction and power over us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

"In the sight of... Christ Jesus" – unlike the false teachers, who would be shown up by Timothy's true and evident faith (vv.11-12), he was to live a Christ-centred life, ready at all times for His return.

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

18-19 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

"Those who are rich in this... world not to be arrogant" – teaching people to avoid the fallacy of wealth which is self-sufficiency and pride, but rather using God-given resources well and taking hold of the values that bring life with an eternal quality.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, September 29, 2019, with commentary notes

A Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, Sept 29**
Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: Living with a heavenly perspective

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15 – Making an investment in God's plans and purposes

Luke 16:19-31 – How earthly sufficiency can lead to losing all

1 Timothy 6:6-19 – Pursuing a life that satisfies, close to God

Also read: Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16, Psalm 146

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15 – Investing in God's plans and purposes

Jeremiah takes a faith position in the future God is revealing

1-2 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah.

3 Now Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him there, saying, "Why do you prophesy as you do? You say, 'This is what the Lord says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.

"Besieging Jerusalem" – this was 588 or 587 BC and would shortly fall to the Babylonian army, the city had been under siege for a year and Jeremiah, whose message was not the party line, was under guard in the palace

6-7 Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.'

8a "Then, just as the Lord had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, 'Buy my

field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.'

"Buy my field" – it was Jeremiah's right to offer to buy his cousin's field in Anathoth, just north of Jerusalem, where he came from. This would keep the property in the family, but in reality it was lost already and under Babylonian occupation. This was a prophetic act of obedience.

8b-10 "I knew that this was the word of the Lord; so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales.

"I knew..." – Jeremiah was acting on what the Lord had already shown him. His cousin had visited him (he was not so much imprisoned as restricted) and he carried out the transaction and had it witnessed formally.

11-12 I took the deed of purchase—the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy – and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard.

"In the presence... of the witnesses" – and the bystanders must have wondered at this public

purchase at full market price of occupied land. But one day the proof of ownership would be needed.

13-15 "In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so

IN PRACTICE Jeremiah lived with a perspective of what God was doing in the present, and a vision of His intentions for the future. He could see above and beyond present circumstances, which for him were dire indeed. We may not feel called as anointed prophets, but Christians who have trusted Jesus with their lives and who welcome the leading of the Holy Spirit share a measure of that same capacity to see where God is pointing. Taking bold decisions based on what is seen with the eyes of faith is one way that God encourages others who are fearful or confused by life's twists and turns.

QUESTION Take a moment to reflect on a confusing or difficult situation that feels like a threat to your life – as Jeremiah did. What do you sense God may bring out of it, that you can plan for?

Luke 16:19-31 – How earthly sufficiency can lead to losing all

The rich man learns too late the danger of selfish complacency

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

"Dressed in purple" – not just a colour but an expensive type of dyed cloth.

20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"Lazarus" – a common name from Hebrew Eleazar, 'whom God has helped'. The only name used in a parable of Jesus, probably for its symbolism. Not the Lazarus raised from the dead, John 11:43-44.

22-23 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

"The beggar died... the rich man also died" – a sharp contrast in the story, with Lazarus being escorted to the father of Jewish believers in heaven, while the rich man who was merely "buried" finds he is in hell.

they will last a long time. For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'

"Put them in a clay jar so they will last" – now Jeremiah reveals the point of the prophetic action, saying that against all the evidence, the Lord was saying that this land and people had a future.

24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"Send Lazarus" – not realising that the earth's values no longer apply.

"I am in agony" – Jesus depicted Hades as a place where hell's torment had already begun: separation from God and all that is good, unfading memories of opportunities lost – and the eternal lake of fire, Matt. 25:41.

25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

"Remember... you received... good things" – Abraham's speech applies the principle of Luke 13:23-30 which ends with "...there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"A chasm has been set in place" – a person's state after death is permanent.

27-28 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Let him warn them" – he proposes a new means of grace for his brothers, implying that he was entitled to such a warning himself.

29-30 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

"No, father Abraham," he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

IN PRACTICE This story confronted a belief held by the Pharisees which, like a lot of deceptions, was a half-truth that had become skewed. The Pharisees were all about a pious lifestyle and religious observance, and from this arose a belief in the merit achieved by good works. For them, the rich demonstrated God's favour and blessing, and they judged that the poor and destitute were the opposite. But they had put the cart before the horse. A heart that knew what God really required – to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with Him – would both please God and also bring transformation in the world. Using well what God has given – which includes showing care and responsibility towards the poor – was, and is, a test of how much we actually love God.

QUESTION What are the comforts of life we may be taking for granted? And who is God showing you, that could do with some comforts for a change?

1 Timothy 6:6-19 – Pursuing a life that satisfies, close to God

Laying up treasure through generosity, not temporal gain

6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

"Godliness with contentment" – a desire for material prosperity creates a shifting aspiration that is never fulfilled, while being at one with Jesus brings a happiness and satisfaction that cannot be found in any other way, Philippians 4:11-12.

9-10 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge

"They have Moses and the prophets" – the whole of Scripture. The parable brings out both the finality of death, and how it is balanced by the sufficiency of the Word. Being generous with money and caring for the poor were clearly taught in the OT.

• **For further study**, see Deut. 14:28, 29; Isaiah 3:14, 15; Micah 6:10, 11

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'

"If they do not listen" – Scripture has divine power to overcome unbelief in those who will hear its message. The Pharisees constantly demanded signs to prove Jesus' Messiahship, although the scriptural evidence about Him was clear and sufficient.

people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

"The love of money" – a wrong, and dangerous, motivation which was being promoted by false teaching that had arisen in Ephesus. The Greek culture encouraged the rewarding of professional orators; this was destructive of the 'body of many parts' and mutuality and fellowship of the Christian church.

• **For further study**, see 1 Peter 5:2; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 15.

11-12 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take