

spiritual leadership assumes and recognises other specific spiritual gifts, 1 Cor. 12:1-14:40.

"Fan into flame" – the Holy Spirit's empowering of us is not automatic, but must be cultivated by exercising faith in using the gifts.

7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

"Not... timid, but gives us power" – the Spirit-filled person gains a Spirit-led confidence. Jesus' challenges are more attainable in the post-resurrection church which expects the empowering of the Spirit.

8 So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

"The testimony" – the Greek word is the root of our word martyr; most of the apostles died for their faith. Witness and adversity go together and Timothy needs to 'man up' in the face of opposition.

9-10 He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been

IN PRACTICE Timothy's situation in Ephesus (this follows up a few years after Paul's earlier letter to Timothy) requires him to show and exercise a fearless quality of faith. The context of this is that he must confront considerable opposition from politically more adept and false teachers who, bound up with their own legalism, are burdening new converts with it. Timothy must hold on to and guard the essential truth of all the good teaching Paul has imparted to him, resisting those who want to shape it by the old rituals. He must "live by faith" in Habakkuk's words, and exercise faith and speak out robustly against difficult opposition, following Jesus' teaching in the gospel passage. Do we see that same kind of struggle today in the church, and in the world around us? Of course we do! In all of these teachings there is the sense of God wanting to partner with us, His Holy Spirit empowering us, to do what is just, right and good with His help – if we will trust Him.

Question From political turmoil to family tensions and the difficulties of everyday life, the spoiler, the devil, is actively at work wherever our sin and disobedience gives him opportunity. What will we do differently, in the light of this teaching?

Prayer Lord, help me to "live by faith" in believing in Your presence and Your promises, and speaking it out, to situations around me – my own and those you show me. Help me to do what little I know to do, and not to watch others hoping they will do it on my behalf – to grow less timid, and more aware of Your power, preference for me and partnership with me, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

"Saved... because of His own grace" – a summary of the Good News emphasising Christ's saving work done for us by destroying death and bringing life.

11-12 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

"No cause for shame" – Paul, prepared for death at any time, looks forward to his reward in eternity, Luke 19:15, 1 Cor. 3:10-15, Rev. 11:15, 18.

13-14 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

"Sound teaching... the good deposit" – which Timothy holds in trust against the attempts of false teachers to degrade it. In every age the gospel is under attack by being watered down or changed.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, October 6, 2019, with commentary notes

A Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, October 6**
Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: The importance of trusting God and exercising an active faith

Lamentations 1:1-6 – The cost of proudly continuing the way we like
with Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Luke 17:5-10 – Jesus tells us to put active faith to work

2 Timothy 1:1-14 – Know the power of the Spirit and stay true

Also read: Psalm 137, Psalm 37:1-9

Lamentations 1:1-6 – The cost of proudly continuing the way we like

A picture of being left bereft with God's glory departed

1 How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations!

"How" – expresses shock as well as sorrow.

2 She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave. Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.

"Queen... become a slave" – from queen to widow and then slave: Jerusalem, the busy city, now seems deserted. The opposites in grammar and language paint a vivid picture of inversion.

"Lovers... friends have betrayed" – while Judah had 'loved' fertility gods Baal and Asherah, neighbours Egypt, Tyre and Sidon had turned hostile.

3 After affliction and harsh labour, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

"She dwells" – remaining southern kingdom Judah is depicted as an abandoned, desolate woman (v.1).

4 The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed festivals. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her young women grieve, and she is in bitter anguish.

"The roads to Zion" – the temple hill stands for the depopulated city. The temple is in ruins, the priests are out of a job and the influx of worshippers thronging the gates for Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles and the other festivals has ceased.

5 Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease. The Lord has brought her grief because of her many sins. Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe.

"The Lord has brought her grief" – now it is made plain that the downfall is deserved.

6 All the splendour has departed from Daughter Zion. Her princes are like deer; in weakness they have fled before the pursuer.

"Splendour... departed" – or God's glory departed, 1 Samuel 4:21, Ezekiel 10:18-19

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

1 The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

2 How long, Lord, must I call for help, but You do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but You do not save?

"How long, Lord" – he thought God indifferent to King Jehoiakin's cruel and corrupt reign

3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence

are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

"Tolerate wrongdoing" – it seems that sin is going unpunished, so there is no justice (also v.4).

Therefore the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

"The law is paralysed" – despite the revelation given by God to Moses at Sinai, people are more interested in material gain than maintaining His fairness.

2:1 I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what He will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

"Station myself" – Habakkuk sees himself as a watchman, like being a look-out who can see into the distance from high up on the ramparts.

2 Then the Lord replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.

"Write down" – as in like Isaiah 30:8, he is

IN PRACTICE Lamentations and Habakkuk's prophecy speak in similar terms of the same time, when Israel's continued disobedience and rejection of their God-given doctrine, and prophetic voices sent by God, can only result in one outcome. Jerusalem with its Zion mount and temple, was a holy city for God's holy people and blessed with His protection – or so the people thought, in their prosperous complacency. When life seems to be going well, we think we have less need to rely on God and that is where it all goes wrong.

Question *These passages contain clear prophetic warnings about the practices of the people of their time. What might prophets today say about our life priorities and whether we live like people of faith.*

Luke 17:5-10 – Jesus tells us to put active faith to work

We want Him to increase our faith, He wants us to learn to use what we have

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

"Increase our faith" – the request of every disciple of every age, trying to live up to Jesus' standards.

• **For further study:** *what genuine, active faith is, John 15:7, James 1:6-8, 1 John 5:21.*

6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

commanded to scribe the vision on a clay tablet so it can be shared accurately with others, like a royal messenger who runs with a message to read out.

3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

"An appointed time" – patience for this true picture of "the end" that will take place. "The enemy" (v.4) are the arrogant within the nation, which has invited the attention of the attackers.

4 "See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright – but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.

"Live by... faithfulness" – or live by his faith, much quoted in this form in the NT; meaning to trust God and His promises even through darkest times.

• **For further study,** *see living by faith, Hebrews 10:38-39 and being saved through grace by faith, Romans 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Eph. 2:8.*

"Faith... as a mustard seed" – Jesus' classic answer compares active, effectual faith with the smallest kind of seed, tiny but living and active.

"Mulberry tree... uprooted" – a near-permanent tree with a vast and deep root system giving a lifespan of several hundred years.

7 "Suppose one of you has a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'?

"A servant ploughing" – the picture is of putting faith to work, to do what faith is meant to do. In that

culture, bond-servants existed to serve their masters.

8-9 Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?

"Won't he rather say" – a master would address his bond-servant commandingly, and would expect duties fulfilled. This describes a robust approach to speaking words of faith which relates to verse 6.

IN PRACTICE Saying to God, "Increase my faith" is where we all start, until we realise it doesn't work like that. And that is exactly what Jesus was teaching. We think we need more faith. And He replies to us that we need to use, really exercise, the faith that we have. That involves us speaking words which set our faith to work and expect results. Faith here is not a general and woolly religious belief, nor is it a mental assent to things we may have been taught – it is an active and practical attitude to life that can speak creative words as words which Jesus Himself is speaking, which even the most deeply rooted tree of difficulty cannot withstand. Faith is confidence in God working with us as we work with Him – and it comes with practice.

Question *What difficult situation comes to mind, which you have been bringing before God, and perhaps wanting Him to increase your faith for asking? How might you do that differently, in speaking out words that convey faith, like in v.6, and expecting that faith to go on working until God's will is done?*

2 Timothy 1:1-14 – Know the power of the Spirit and stay true

Timothy's mentor has shown him the way of courageous faith

1-2 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

"To Timothy, my dear son" – who was Paul's young apprentice and travelling companion, then left to build up the church in Ephesus which was set back by some who asserted that Christians should follow Jewish ritual conditions.

3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

"As my ancestors did" – Paul sets out his heritage in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Christian faith was not a new religion, or even a new take on an old

• **For further study,** *read Matthew 17:20; Matt. 21:18-22; Mark 11:22-24.*

10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'

"Only done our duty" – without expectation of reward, because in the kingdom of God, grace is given which by definition is received without any sense of merit.

religion, but at the same time bore grateful witness to godly people of the past.

4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.

"Tears" – at Paul being taken to Rome under arrest.

5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

"Your sincere faith" – in this mixed Greek and Jewish church it was significant that Timothy's mother and grandmother were both Christians of Jewish origin, while his father was a Gentile.

6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

"Fan... the gift of God" – the impartation given at Paul's hand at the time of his public commissioning, or ordination. This anointing for