

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 – Paul defies death with the gift of righteousness

Fear of execution is met by confidence in the Lord drawing him safely to Himself

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.

"A drink offering" – Paul pictures his death in the language of OT sacrifices. "Being poured out" – he is laying down his life, God is acting here.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

"Finished the race" – he reflects on more than 30 testing years, 36-68 AD, as an envoy of the kingdom.

8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.

"Crown" – lit. 'a surrounding', a plaited garland placed on the head of a winner or victor, representing eternal righteousness. Believers receive the imputed righteousness of Christ at their decision for salvation – and then run the lifetime race for the assured prize.

IN PRACTICE Paul had nearly died in perils and persecution, a number of times in three decades of finding people, telling them about Jesus and seeing churches grow up. Not everyone liked his message. It was the ones like the tax collector who found God's mercy and became part of the assembly of believers, and the ones like the Pharisee who called for Paul to be stoned or taken captive. Now he knew his promotion was due – and although he had been made right with God when meeting Jesus on the Damascus road many years before, He looked forward to receiving the wreath of honour which awaits every believer in heaven. If anyone had earned it, he had – but he knew that his efforts counted for nothing. It was all about Jesus, His Lord and Saviour.

QUESTION Can you joyfully call Jesus Your Lord and Saviour?

PRAYER Once again, Lord, we find ourselves thanking You for all You have done, and asking forgiveness for ever thinking that we did something that would bring us new life, and eternal life. Thank You again for the gift of righteousness, far above anything we could ever earn. Amen.

16 At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.

"First defence" – our law in the UK is based on Roman law which provided a preliminary hearing to test the case (as a magistrates' court does) followed by full trial hearing.

"Deserted" – it was risky to stand with a man accused of a capital offence. Paul, like Jesus, forgives those whose support flagged.

17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.

"Lion's mouth" – great danger. Paul, a Roman citizen, could not be killed by lions.

18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

"Rescue me" – Paul expected to die soon (verse 6) so the rescue is spiritual, his transition to heavenly glory.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, October 27, 2019, with commentary notes

Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, October 27**
Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: Our imagined merit blocks us from God's crowning gift

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-end – A prophet's appeal to God to remember His covenant with Joel 2:23-32

Luke 18:9-14 – Proud piety repels but humble repentance finds God's peace

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 – Paul, near death, knows his righteousness is in Jesus

Also read: Psalm 84:1-7, Psalm 65

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-end – An appeal to remember the covenant

Sin calls for real repentance, not pleading our entitlement

7 Although our sins testify against us, do something, Lord, for the sake of Your name. For we have often rebelled; we have sinned against You.

"Our sins testify" – the prophet prays on behalf of the people. The other side of the coin to Joel's prophecy (below), also in a time of severe drought, here seen as God's judgment.

8 You who are the hope of Israel, its Saviour in times of distress, why are You like a stranger in the land, like a traveller who stays only a night?

"Hope for Israel" – widely-used covenant name for God.

• **For further study**, read Jer. 17:7, 13, 50:7; Psalm 71:5, Acts 28:20, Col. 1:27, 1 Tim. 1:1

9 Why are You like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save? You are among us, Lord, and we bear Your name; do not forsake us!

"We bear Your name" – meaning, 'after all, we belong to you'. Jeremiah asks whether God will help the nation for the sake of His reputation, Lamentations 1:20-22, 2:20-22.

10 This is what the Lord says about this people: "They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet. So the Lord does not accept them; He will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins."

"They love to wander" – God's initial response is that the people called back to Him still want to hedge their bets between Him and Baal worship.

19 Have You rejected Judah completely? Do you despise Zion? Why have You afflicted us so that we cannot be healed? We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there is only terror.

"Have You rejected... completely" – the prophet pleads for the people again.

20 We acknowledge our wickedness, Lord, and the guilt of our ancestors; we have indeed sinned against You.

"Our wickedness... the guilt of our ancestors" – Jeremiah confesses the people's sins, but his intercession has been decreed unacceptable – see omitted verses 11-12: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Do not pray for the well-being of this people. Although they fast, I will not listen...'"

21 For the sake of Your name do not despise us; do not dishonour Your glorious throne. Remember Your covenant with us and do not break it.

"Remember Your covenant" – despite the command above (v.11), Jeremiah pleads the historical promise of God, Leviticus 26:44-45 – "... For their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt... to be their God. I am the Lord."

22 Do any of the worthless idols of the

nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is You, Lord our God. Therefore our hope is in You, for You are the One who does all this.

"Send down showers... It is You, Lord" – Israelites believed that all weather was in the gift of God.

Joel 2:23-32

The promise of all being able to be right with God

23 Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for He has given you the autumn rains because He is faithful. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.

"Be glad" – Joel may have lived around the same time as Jeremiah, and his message has similarities (also with Isaiah, Amos and Zephaniah). Repeated unfaithfulness leads to judgment – here being experienced in a time of prolonged drought – but the Lord's greater plan is for repentance to follow and open the way for the blessing He wants to bring.

"Autumn and spring rains" – needed in Israel with no river irrigation like the Nile. Rain withheld was seen as a sign of God's disfavour, Jeremiah 14:22 (below) and Jer. 3:3, Hosea 6:3.

24-25 The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten – the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm – My great army that I sent against you.

"The locust swarm" – symbolic of the various invading armies that threatened Israel, and all spiritual robbery from our lives.

"My great army" – in the sense that Yahweh is the sovereign lord of history, and oppressing nations may end up serving His purposes.

26 "You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will My people be shamed.

"God, who has worked wonders" – before, in coming out of Egypt, Exodus 14:21-22, 15:11. Now the promise is to restore the crops and food supply.

27 "Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed.

"I am in Israel" – a reversal of the Lord's departure, Ezekiel 10:18, see Ezekiel chapters 8-11.

"You will know" – a covenant phrase, Israel will know His presence with them. This points further to the coming reign of King Jesus, Zeph. 3:14-20.

28 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

"Afterward" – beyond the immediate restoration, the time of the Messiah.

"I will pour out My Spirit" – referenced by Peter speaking on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:14-21.

29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

"My servants" – up to now the Spirit had been given to kings, prophets, priests and other special people. Now there is no age, gender or social distinction, with even bond servants included.

30-31 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

"I will show" – OT prophecies are best understood as both near-term (the drought ending) and long-term (Jesus, Son of God appears and will come again) in their fulfilment.

"Sun... turned to darkness" – eclipses, 'blood moons' and other celestial signs would herald the end-time judgment.

32 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

"Everyone... the name of the Lord" – Starting at Pentecost, all are invited into God's personal covenant relationship. Paul teaches that Gentiles and Jews together are saved through Christ, Romans 10:13.

IN PRACTICE These two OT prophecies come out of the same situation – a severe and prolonged lack of rain. Drought, and famine, wasn't something that should happen under God's covenant provision. Something was wrong: it was a sign of God's judgment. At that time, people knew that sin, acting independently from God, had consequences – but human nature looks for excuses. There is a note of entitlement sounding in the people's voice, reflected in Jeremiah's plea. However, putting things right with God (through repentance) is the only way to honour God, cancel out those consequences, and to release His blessing. The quest for righteousness (able to be right with God) hasn't changed but Joel saw in the Spirit how it would become a lot less complicated and more inclusive. The time would come when "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". This is the heart of the Good News that Jesus brought and enabled. Because of what He has done, His work alone, anyone can come to Him and find the peace of being made right with God.

QUESTION *If drought was a sign to the nation then, what might God be showing us?*

Luke 18:9-14 – Humble repentance, not piety, finds God's peace

Jesus contrasts a Pharisee unfavourably with a tax collector

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

"This parable" – Luke gives a commentary first.

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

"To the temple to pray" – people went to the temple to pray, not always at times of sacrifice.

11-12 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

"The Pharisee" – regarded as the leading moral examples. This one stood a little apart and used the

"I" word five times in making his case before God.

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

"The tax collector" – a social outcast, despised for working with the Gentile rulers and profiting from commission. With no good works to offer he called himself a sinner, pleading mercy by God's grace.

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

"This man... went home justified" – a shocking statement for Jesus' hearers, turning their presuppositions upside down (like the Samaritan who was the "true neighbour", Luke 10:30-37).

IN PRACTICE Now we come to Jesus' teaching, and the story of the two men who went to the temple to pray and find God. They were complete opposites – so much so, they wouldn't normally have anything to do with each other. The part of the story that upset Jesus' hearers was His question and answer. Who went home knowing that they were right with God – were justified, in His language? Everyone there would have voted for the careful, strict, observant Pharisee – that list of good works was the tick box 'faith' that Jews thought they had to do. Jesus shocked them by pointing to the shameful tax collector, recognising his need and coming to God with an appeal to His mercy, as the one who went home with a sense of God's love and peace surrounding him.

QUESTION *Is there a part of us that wants to think we can have favour with God through our good actions? What would happen if we came to God just as we are?*