

not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

"Since I heard" – Paul knew Ephesus but is now writing to an expanded church and network of believers in the area.

"Your faith... Your love" – Paul links faith in Jesus and love for God's people. True saving faith always shows in the quality of relationships in the fellowship and beyond.

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.

"I keep asking" – Paul's prayers, recorded here vv.16-23 and 3:14-21, give a picture of the prayer life behind the growth and vitality of the early church.

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people,

"Eyes of your heart... enlightened" – the "heart" is an expression of the centre of one's will and human spirit. Receiving an impartation by the Spirit, of wisdom to know God by revelation, is the change of heart and perception described here.

19-20 and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the

IN PRACTICE Paul later wrote his very last letter to Timothy, saying: "I know whom I have believed...", 2 Tim. 1:12. This passage is Paul's prayer that Ephesian readers would know, really know, the One they have believed: the fullest revelation, by the Holy Spirit, of knowing who God is and how He is. He reminds his readers that when they first heard the message of truth and believed, they had a heart change. The Holy Spirit did a work in them so that they could see, spiritually, what they did not see before. And so it is for us. Through reading or hearing the Word the Holy Spirit speaks to us, we take a step of believing, and what was the hiddenness of God and His kingdom starts to be revealed.

QUESTION *Do you hear the message of truth once, or many times, at different levels? What is the effect of this hearing?*

PRAYER Father, I come to You through Jesus and ask for myself, that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened to fully know what it means to belong to You in a new, eternal and empowered life. As I reflect on the power plays of politicians and how they come and go, I ask for the spiritual impartation that brings the real, lasting and good change of Your kingdom order, in me and around me. Amen.

dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms...

"Power for us who believe" – spiritual empowering is the third spiritual perception Paul is praying for, together with the confident assurance that is Christian hope, and belonging to God as part of His inheritance. Ephesus people sought power over supernatural forces through magic and the occult; Paul stacks up the description of the real power available to the believer, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

21 ...far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

"Far above all rule and authority" – the power of God not only raised Jesus to new life in a resurrection body, but placed Him in the position of greatest authority over every known power, from where He now reigns.

22-23 And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

"Under His feet" – in pictures from the ancient Middle East, victorious kings are shown with their feet on the necks of defeated enemies. This emphasises Christ reigning as king over all things.

The Living Word

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

Bible readings for Sunday, November 3, 2019, with commentary notes

Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, November 3**
Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: Living up to the kingdom order which is ours in Christ

Daniel 7:1-8, 15-18 – World powers come and go but God's kingdom endures

Luke 6:20-31 – Reliance on God empowers a higher way of life

Ephesians 1:11-23 – The Holy Spirit gives believers a life-changing inheritance

Also read: Psalm 149

Daniel 7:1-8, 15-18 – The failure of empires leads to God's kingdom

What God's people receive is higher authority than any empire of man

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.

"First year" – 553 BC; Daniel is not chronological and this chapter's events occur before chapter 5.

2 Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea.

"The great sea" – Mediterranean or figuratively, all the Gentile people of the world. In the OT, the sea also stands for evil chaos.

3 Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

"Four great beasts" – the churning sea produces a succession of frightening, uncontrollable creatures

4 "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.

"A lion [with the] wings of an eagle" – representing Babylon and its swift conquests

5 "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'

"Bear... and... three ribs" – the Medo-Persian empire and ribs representing its three conquests of Lydia, then Babylon, then Egypt (546-525 BC).

6 "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

"Leopard [with] four wings – representing the pounce of the Greeks led by Alexander the Great who rapidly conquered the known world, an empire that divided into four on his death in 323 BC.

7 "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast – terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

"Fourth beast [with] iron teeth... and... ten horns – 10 main rulers, from Julius Caesar to Domitian, of the proud and merciless Roman Empire.

8 "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

"A mouth that spoke boastfully" – future rise of the "boastful" antichrist, foretold in various ways:

• **For further study**, compare the coming ruler and the king who will do what ever he wants, Dan. 9:26, 11:36; the man of lawlessness and doomed to destruction, 2 Thess. 2:3; the beast, Rev. 13:1-10; and the antichrist, 1 John 2:18.

15 "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.

16 I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things:

IN PRACTICE Daniel had already lived in exile for half a century when in this dream he had the dramatic apocalyptic vision which he recounts here. He saw how the mighty Babylonian empire which had captured him would itself be overcome. God's people would not be wiped out but gathered to receive the kingdom. This illustrates for us the conflict between the 'empires' of man's ambition and control we see in all of life, and the just rule and order that God wants to bring. Ungodly control is unspiritual and oppressive; the kingdom of God is feels encouraging and life-giving.

QUESTION *Where do we see man's control blocking the life God longs to bring?*

Luke 6:20-31 – Reliance on God empowers a higher way of life

Jesus' Sermon on the Plain overturns the world's assumptions

20 Looking at His disciples, He said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"You who are poor" – This Sermon on the Plain repeated much of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7), on another occasion. Here Jesus focuses on His disciples, in the hearing of the bigger crowd, with the personal "you who are" address, and "poor" being more than "poor in spirit".

21-22 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

"Hate... because of the Son of Man" – the hearers would have seen the parallel between the historic prophets (v.23) and their call to follow Jesus.

23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

"One of those standing there" – Daniel takes a risk in approaching one of the angels presiding over the spectacle who helps him understand the vision, which extends to the end times.

17 'The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth.

18 'But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever – yes, for ever and ever.'

"Holy people... will receive the kingdom" – those set apart by faith to God and His Messiah will be part of His final and enduring kingdom on earth.

"Treated the prophets" – everyone there would know how prophets were persecuted in OT history.

• **For further study**, see 1 Kings 18:4, 13, 22:7; 2 Chron. 16:10, 24:20-21; Nehemiah 9:26; Jer. 2:30, 11:18-22, 37:15-16.

24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

"You who are rich" – not condemning riches, or abundance, or social acceptance but our wanting these worldly benefits over and above the things of the kingdom of God.

25 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

"You who laugh now" – not a judgment on joy or humour, but in the context of the rich and satisfied, a warning against mocking and condescending rather than caring.

26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

"The false prophets" – everyone welcomed the court prophets who spoke "peace, peace" when there was no peace (Jer. 6:14), telling hearers what

they wanted to hear. By contrast, Jesus showed His frequent rejection to be proof of His authenticity.

27-28 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

"Your enemies" – Jews despised the Gentile Romans, not least because of their oppression of God's people. They understood Lev. 19:18, "Love your neighbour as yourself", as preferring family and friends and having nothing to do with enemies. Jesus radically changes this, to choosing to extend love to those not worthy of it.

IN PRACTICE The kingdom order which Jesus teaches here is confrontational from the first words: "... You who are poor... yours is the kingdom of God." Jews of Jesus' time saw the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 in black and white: the poor showed God's blessing absent, and this justified a smug attitude, guarding what was yours. Jesus told His disciples they would know rejection and hatred for following Him, but they were to be generous in attitude, loving and forgiving those who were mean towards them. Everything we have, we hold in trust for the kingdom, to use well by God's values.

QUESTION *Is there a difference between being blessed as being poor, or blessed as being poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3)?*

Ephesians 1:11-23 – The Holy Spirit brings a life-changing inheritance

We are enabled to know God through spiritual revelation

11 In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, "Predestined according to [His] plan" – in the context of the rest of Scripture, not just a lucky divine choice, but our freewill decision for Christ (v.12), enabled by the Holy Spirit, which was always foreknown as part of God's salvation plan.

12 In order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory.

"We, who were the first" – Paul refers to himself and fellow Jews who had become believers, writing to a mainly Gentile readership.

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth,

29-30 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

"Slaps you... takes your coat" – believers will encounter abuse and injustice but are to face such rejection in a generous spirit, not retaliation.

31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"Do to others" – this Golden Rule in Jesus' teaching (uniquely) is love for all people, including hostile ones, as the ethic that governs all behaviour.

the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...

"You heard... you believed" – the "message of truth", the Good News of Jesus, His kingdom and His salvation, has to be heard, Romans 10:17, and believed, John 1:12. The result is receiving new life, in which the Holy Spirit brings assurance – a seal of what will be inherited.

14 ...who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory.

"A deposit" – the same idea as the "seal", the Holy Spirit working in us witnessing that we really are God's children.

15-16 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have