

our ability to see physically; the rule of darkness prevents unbelievers being aware of their spiritual condition. Some Colossian Christians may have feared remaining prisoners of sinister powers and been tempted to seek superstitious remedies rather than the deliverance, or redemption, of Christ.

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

*"Image of the invisible God" – the Greek word, also in 2 Cor. 4:4, means exact representation. The two truths set out here are that God is invisible, John 1:18 but Christ the eternal Son of God reflects and reveals the Father.*

• **For further study:** Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father," John 14:9. Hebrews 1:3 states that the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being.

16 For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him.

*"Thrones or powers..." – false teachers on Colossae had produced a heretical preoccupation with spiritual hierarchies and the worship of angelic beings alongside Christ, Col. 2:18. Paul asserts that Christ is pre-eminent and Creator, not created.*

17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

**IN PRACTICE** It is sometimes derided as 'simple faith', as if faith in Jesus is the recourse of simple people who cannot think up anything better. It is also the truth. Jesus did reconcile to Himself all things. In Jesus, all things really do hold together. As Isaiah said, "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags". There is only one thing we can do to truly please God, and that is to live a life worthy of Him by believing Him and choosing to make Him Lord. Once we agree that our efforts don't count for anything, but His effort on our behalf counts for everything, the picture changes, the confusion of darkness melts away and we know we are rescued – and loved.

**QUESTION** *There's a problem with being rescued – it's knowing we need rescuing. Our sense of self-sufficiency doesn't want to surrender. Do you know you need rescuing and redeeming, now and every day? Do you know and trust your rescuer?*

**PRAYER** Lord, I read that in You all things hold together, and all man's supposed powers and authorities have been created by You. At a time of national uncertainty and difficult choices, I look to You, Jesus, because You are the way and the truth and the life – and I ask that those we see making speeches and offering promises day by day, may also find themselves moved by Your Spirit to turn to You. Praise You, Jesus, Amen.

*"Before all things" – pre-existent before creation, therefore by definition, eternal.*

• **For further study,** see Micah 5:2; John 1:1, 2; 8:58; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 22:13.

18 And He is the Head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.

*"Head of the body" – Paul wrote about the unity of Christ and His church as His body, 1 Cor. 12:27; here he further emphasises Christ as the Head, the authority and source.*

19-20 For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the Cross.

*"Fullness of God" – plainly meaning the totality of God, His attributes and all His powers; Paul has borrowed this gnostic philosophical term from the false teachers and deftly redefined it.*

*"Peace" – cessation of conflict in the sense that dark heavenly powers, v.16, are subjugated. When the emperor brought his enemies, although still active, into subjection, he could claim to have established peace.*

# The Living Word

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

Bible readings for Sunday, November 24, 2019, with commentary notes

Bible study on Revised Common Lectionary passages for **Sunday, November 24**

*Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching*

**Theme: Jesus, the Lord our righteousness**

Jeremiah 23:1-6 – This shepherd will impart His righteousness to His people

Luke 23:33-43 – Jesus is the saviour to whom anyone can turn for salvation

Colossians 1:11-20 – Jesus is first, foremost – and our freedom bringer

And also: Psalm 46

**Jeremiah 23:1-6 – A shepherd who will impart His own righteousness**

**A corrupted lineage ends but a new branch of David's root will appear**

1 "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD.

*"Woe to the shepherds" – rulers and some priests and prophets in the OT are commonly called the nation's shepherds, reflecting care of the Lord's flock delegated to them. This was written at a time when deportations were occurring, yet a succession of kings – Shallum, Jehoiakim, Jechoiachin and now Zedekiah were "scattering" the flock in stubborn pride, Jeremiah chapter 22.*

2 Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend My people: "Because you have scattered My flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD.

*"Bestowed care... bestow punishment – the Lord is saying through Jeremiah, that because leaders have not taken care of His people, He will "take care of" i.e. punish them, the same double meaning in Hebrew as in colloquial English.*

3 "I myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number.

*"I will... gather the remnant" – the ultimate Good Shepherd, the Lord, Psalm 23:1, John 14:11,14 will bring back the repentant faithful survivors to their land, Judah. This refers to the first resettlement and also future times, not all fulfilled.*

4 I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.

*"Shepherds... who will tend them" – God would raise up righteous leaders like Ezra, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah – and looking far into the future, would bring His people back from "all the countries", v.3, into their land and safety.*

5 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.

*"Raise up for David a righteous branch" – a significant passage about the branch (or Messiah) coming from David but new growth rather than the main stem, the same idea as a "shoot... from the stump of Jesse", Isaiah 11:1. The current unrighteous king Zedekiah is a direct descendant of King David; he will be the last of the line.*

6 In His days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which He will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Saviour.

"The name" – Yahweh Tsidqenu, the Lord our righteousness, a play on the king's name, Tsidqiyahu (Zedekiah), 'righteous is the Lord' or 'the Lord my righteousness'. The Lord is saying He will bring about a complete reversal of Zedekiah's wicked mockery of His name, in a ruler who would

not only be righteous in every way but would impart righteousness to those who believed in Him.

• For further study: This is justification by faith in Christ, where by no action other than our faith His righteousness becomes imparted to us, 2 Cor. 5:21, Romans 4:5-8.

**IN PRACTICE** This prophecy of Jeremiah, given against the backdrop of Babylon's progressive conquest and deportation, gives us one of the most significant covenant names of God – and points us clearly to Jesus. The "righteous branch", a title for the Messiah, would be rooted in King David but grow out in a different way from the direct descendants who had become corrupt – particularly Zedekiah who spectacularly failed to live up to his name. Jeremiah saw in the Spirit how God turned the name of the bad shepherd Zedekiah, 'the Lord my righteousness', into a new prophetic promise of huge significance. The coming Good Shepherd would be 'the Lord OUR righteousness'. We look back and can see how Jeremiah foretold the coming of Jesus Christ, and gave us the basis of our redemption and freedom. It is not about our striving to be righteous. It is all about what He, the Lord our righteousness, has done for us. All we 'do' is believe Him and trust Him for who He is.

**QUESTION** Why is it important for us to study and have some familiarity with the Old Testament? How does it help us understand the New?

**Luke 23:33-43** – Jesus is the Saviour to whom anyone can turn

#### **A criminal on a cross turns and trusts Jesus for eternal life**

33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.

"The Skull" – Golgotha in Aramaic and Calvaria in Latin, probably a hill by a main road just outside the city – the Romans used very public places for execution. Either named as an execution site or because the rocks resembled a skull – or both.

34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up His clothes by casting lots.

"They do not know" – the soldiers, in particular, were unaware that they were fulfilling the words of Psalm 22:18. The fruit of Christ's pronouncement of forgiveness was soon evident in thousands of salvations beginning at Pentecost.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

"Rulers... sneered" – Luke's quotation also looks back to Psalm 22:7-8 "All who see Me mock Me... 'He trusts in the Lord... let the Lord rescue Him...'"

36-37 The soldiers also came up and mocked Him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

"Wine vinegar" – the cheapest wine drunk by thirsty labourers and soldiers. It was not a kind offering, but one which would prolong his agony.

38 There was a written notice above Him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

"A written notice" – it was not unusual for a tablet to detail the crime, in this case, treason: crucifixion was a deterrent punishment. It was also Pilate's way of mocking the Jewish leaders who had insisted on the death sentence.

"Jesus is King" – ironic: a king, stripped and executed publicly, must have lost his kingdom. In reality, Jesus was just coming into His.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: "Aren't you the

Messiah? Save Yourself and us!"

40-41 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom."

"Jesus, remember me" – only Luke records this exchange with a criminal who was abusive to Him,

**IN PRACTICE** Here is a vivid picture of what Jesus, the Righteous One, had done for us in becoming the Lord our righteousness. His life is being given up, so that we, like the criminal in the story, deserving to be put to death for our sinful rebellion against God, can choose to turn to Jesus and ask Him to receive us into His kingdom. Can it be as simple as that? Can we really come to Jesus without any track record of our goodness or deservedness? The repentant criminal did!

**QUESTION** Why do many people become Christians while in prison, yet those whose lives are well-ordered find it difficult?

**Colossians 1:11-20** – Jesus is first, foremost – and our freedom

#### **The Son of God is the complete image and fullness of God**

9-10 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God...

"Knowledge of His will" – almost the same as living "a life worthy of the Lord" later in the sentence. It is the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the believer that imparts a sense of God's will as a dominant note of the new, fruitful and growing life.

"You may live a life worthy..." – literally 'that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him' (NKJ). 'To walk' is a Jewish expression for how you conduct your life, corresponding to the halakah tradition of the rabbis. Former rabbi Paul is saying, do not live by the oral religious traditions of Judaism but rather in a way fully pleasing to Jesus, the Lord.

11 ...being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that

and the other criminal who believed who He was, and trusted Him. This shows that our deeds do not save us, but our faith in Jesus Christ does, whoever we are.

43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise."

"Paradise" – from a Persian word meaning garden, used to represent the Garden of Eden and also heaven, the place of eternal bliss for God's people.

• For further study, see 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2.7 and also Luke 16:22-23; 2 Cor. 5:8.

you may have great endurance and patience...

"Strengthened with all power" – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead empowers Christians to 'walk worthy' with patience and joy in the face of trials. In the Greek-Roman world seeking spiritual power, mainly through occult practice, was thought to be a route to wealth and influence. Paul wanted them to experience the Holy Spirit's real empowering.

12 ...and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light.

"Who has qualified you... to share...in the kingdom of light" – quite unlike a qualification we could attain, this is God making us sufficient through Jesus Christ.

13-14 For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

"Dominion of darkness" – causes a spiritual blindness in the same way that nightfall hampers