

"Human anger" – when things go wrong our first reaction is retaliation. Until we let go of that first response of, literally, "man's anger", we are blind to the perspective of God's righteousness.

21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

"Get rid of" – literally "put off" like mucky overalls. Commanded in Eph. 4:22, 1 Peter 2:1.

"Humbly accept" – as those who are teachable.

"The word planted in you" – referencing the 'new covenant' prophecy of Jer. 31:31-34 where God promises to 'write His law' on His people's hearts.

"Save you" – sin is the opposite of life-giving, it is death-bringing: first spiritually, then physically.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

"Merely listen" – the teachable spirit wants to learn and apply. To not respond is to invite deception.

"Deceive" – or delude yourselves. Used in mathematics: those listening but not engaging have made a serious miscalculation.

"Do" – more literally, "prove yourselves doers of the word" (NASB). As Jesus taught, Matt. 7:24, 26; Luke 6:46, 49.

**IN PRACTICE** Being made holy – the long word is sanctification – is truly a life-long process which starts with new birth through the word of truth. The truth that is God's word continues to confront and bring change to our deep-seated human independence, and all the attitudes and responses that come from that. We were born in selfishness and independence from God and coming back to Him in holiness is a long journey, with a big step change we call the new birth. All the time the word and the Holy Spirit are working together to transform us from the inside, with our willingness or resistance playing a big part in that. James' teaching here is about not destroying the good process by "merely listening," "not doing what it says" and entertaining "human anger" – but working with God the Father to become people who find ourselves doing what He would have us doing.

**QUESTION** When God speaks through His word, what helps you to put it into practice?

**PRAYER** Lord, help me to purify my heart and make it yours. I know it's a process, but I pledge my willingness to work with You and listen when You show me what needs to change. Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of Jesus, and grow me to be more Jesus-like as I do my part. Amen.

23-25 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do.

"Forgets what he looks like" – not acting on something in your reflection that needs attention is to forget to do it. Similarly with the word of God, the mirror showing what is askew in our soul.

26-27 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

"Religious... religion" – a play on this word which contrasts ceremonial, rituals and external trappings with genuine faith. Perhaps the third 'religion' should be in quotes. Religious acts are no substitute for changed values and a changed, unselfish way of life.

# The Living Word

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

The Bible readings for Sunday, Sept 2, 2018, with commentary notes

## Church calendar readings for Sunday, September 2, in Bible order

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

Theme: **The Lord of love who changes our hearts from within**

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 » A loving heart celebrated in a love poem

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 » Religious tradition can't hide what is in our heart

James 1:17-27 » The word of God is a mirror to show us our true heart

## Song of Solomon 2:8-13 » A loving heart celebrated in a love poem

### The spring season of God's love comes into flower

The Song of Songs is part of the Biblical wisdom literature, which celebrate love and wisdom as gifts of God to be received gratefully and joyfully. The title tells us it was written by Solomon and the best love song about marriage ever written. It is the story of various encounters between a young Shulammite girl, chosen for the king's harem, and her feelings of real love and relationship. It could also be Solomon's wistful story of an earlier marriage with an Israelite girl, before departing from monogamy and Jewish integrity in a (likely) arranged marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, 1 Kings 3:1, Deut. 7:6. Early interpreters saw this as an allegory of God's love for His people, or His church. Recent scholarship has seen this love poem for what it is, as it states, a work of Solomon, who reflects on the purity of simple, unfettered romance compared with the experience of every kind of need provided for in the palace. However, it also speaks illustratively of Christ's deep love for His church.

8 Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.

9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering

through the lattice.

The girl looks out for her lover with eager anticipation; she sees him as like an agile deer, adept at surmounting obstacles. They just want to be together, despite obstacles.

10 My beloved spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me.

11 See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.

Winter in the Middle East can be a cloudy, gloomy season of rain, but the transition to spring is rapid.

12 Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land.

"Singing" – more likely from the context than 'pruning' in older versions.

13 The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.

Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

All the senses are aroused in this description of the land awakening.

14 My dove in the clefts of the rock, in

> continued

the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

*Doves were associated with love; Solomon is saying that*

**IN PRACTICE** This excerpt from Solomon's love song speaks to us about being real about love and its emotions and sensuality – all God-given. It can also be seen as a picture of God's love for His church – and for us. He wants to capture our hearts more than any passionate young lover can express.

**QUESTION** *What gets inhibits you from revelling in God's love for you?*

*in her, he experiences love. The hidden Shulammitte girl is the real dove who he wants to see and hear. The words face...voice, voice...face are in the form of a literary mirror.*

**Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23** » Religious tradition can't disguise our heart

**Religious leaders accuse Jesus of disregarding the tradition of the elders, and He points out the falsehood of departing from loving God and His ways.**

*In this chapter the Pharisees become more outspoken in opposing Jesus, and the gap between true spirituality and man-created religious tradition becomes more evident.*

1-4 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of His disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

*"Teachers of the law... from Jerusalem" – a delegation of leading Pharisees who had come from the city, probably at the invitation of the Galilean Pharisees. Mark's readers in Rome needed additional background on the ways of Judaism to understand the dispute.*

*"Defiled... unwashed" – this washing had nothing to do with dirty hands. Someone would pour water out of a jar onto your hands with the fingers pointing up, then again over both hands with the fingers pointing down. This created a ritual*

*dissociation with anything 'unclean' the hands might have touched. There was nothing in the law of Moses about washing hands before eating, except for priests about to eat holy offerings.*

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't Your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

*"Tradition of the elders" – this was a collection of laws and interpretations constructing rules of living that went beyond the Scriptures. At this point it had become a higher religious authority in Judaism than Scripture itself. Jesus was held responsible for His disciples.*

6-7 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

*"These people honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.*

*They worship Me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'*

*Isaiah's prophecy, here in the Greek version, perfectly describes the attitudes of the Pharisees and scribes Jesus encountered. They were 'pretenders', masked actors, the original meaning of hypocrites, holding a sham spirituality like many religious people today, where knowing God and His ways had been replaced by unscriptural and non-binding "merely human rules" listing various 'oughts and musts'. They had turned living in God's love and faithfulness and knowing His heart,*

*into a religion of performing the right actions.*

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

*"Commands of God...human traditions" – Jesus told them they had abandoned the Ten Commandments and Moses' summary of Deuteronomy 6:1-6 and Deut. 11:1. God's heart was to be on their hearts, but instead they had created an exclusive and over-complicated religious system of 'holiness', misunderstanding Lev. 11:44, that missed the point – what we call a 'tick box mentality' that actually cancelled out God's word, verse 13.*

14-15 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to Me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."

*"Listen to Me, everyone" – Jesus makes a bold and*

*clear statement to encourage his hearers, at the expense of infuriating the religious leaders.*

21-23 For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

*"Outside a person... from within" – it is not living in an impure world that is defiling, but harbouring impure or evil thoughts. Sin separates from God, not unclean hands. What a person is on the inside will be expressed and show them to be of true character and therefore purity – or show them up.*

*Post-resurrection and Pentecost, the apostles taught that spiritual rebirth and the empowered life of the Spirit enabled believers to choose to live in their new nature, above selfish 'flesh' motives.*

**IN PRACTICE** This is clear teaching by Jesus of the folly of the Pharisees' practice of religious righteousness (and their pride in it) while harbouring hatred and a desire to speak badly and untruthfully about Him and even try to kill him. To 'major on the minors' of tradition while missing the point by having resentful hearts is a lesson for us all. Turning to Jesus and acknowledging His Lordship in a personal submission is like having a whole new heart, which the Holy Spirit continues to indwell to make us more Jesus-like.

**QUESTION** *Have you truly given your heart to Jesus? And which part of your heart might He still be asking you to hand over?*

**James 1:17-27** » The word of God is a mirror to show us our true heart

**We are responsible for ridding ourselves of wrong attitudes**

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

*"Father of... lights" – an ancient Jewish expression. God created the sun, moon and stars, which all move in the sky, cast moving shadows and vary in brightness. God's light is constant, Mal 3:6, 1 John 1:5.*

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all He created.

*"First-fruits" – in the OT, an expression for the first and best of the harvest. Christians are to show God's new creation that is to come, 2 Peter 3:10-13, examples of the ultimate restoration of creation, Romans 8:20-22.*

19-20 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

*"Quick to listen (etc)" – the outline of this letter expanded in James 1:21-2-26 (listen), 3:1-18 (slow to speak) and 4:1-5:18 (slow to anger).*