

real to others. And we can ask for more at any time, because it has been given.

**QUESTION** Samaria was a challenging place for the disciples to tell people about God's kingdom. Where might 'Samaria' be for us?

### 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 – We resist the devil in God's greater power

**The enemy brings threats and tests but we praise God for His power**

12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.

*"Do not be surprised" – attempting to lead a Christ-centred life is a threat and can be expected to bring hostility.*

• **For further study**, see John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29.

14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.

*"Under God's mighty hand" – recalling God's deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus, Exodus 3:19, 32:11, Deut. 4:34. Humiliation brings God's affirmation for believers who don't retaliate but submit to His deliverance and timing.*

**REFLECTION** "Humble yourselves" – what does that mean? The opposite would be pretending we can put the enemy down. We can't – but Jesus already did. So when our 'mouthy' adversary has a go – making his threats or trying to place his fears – let him find Jesus with the scarred hands is the one he is talking to. "Be alert," says Peter, expecting us to be discerning about who we listen to, because the battle takes place mostly in our thought life – and in God's power we are able to say 'no' to a thought that doesn't belong.

**QUESTION** How well do you discern 'your' thoughts and where they come from?

**PRAYER** Lord God Almighty, I humble myself before You in Your might, majesty, dominion and power. When things get difficult, I often start by pretending that I can handle them. But when I step aside and trust You, I see Your power come through and the enemy silenced. Be filling me with Your Holy Spirit, that I may be growing in You, and can be a channel of Your love and truth to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

*"Your anxiety on Him" – actively trusting in God's fatherly care.*

8-9 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

*"Your enemy the devil" – the adversary and accuser of every Christian, Satan's repeated strategy is to "roar" and plant fear in our minds. Faith that speaks out the victory Jesus won and the power of His shed blood is effective, Ephesians 6:12-18.*

10-11 And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

*"Suffered a little while" – what to us can seem a long while, is momentary in the context of eternity spent with God.*

• **For further study**, see 1 Peter 1:6; Romans 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

# The Living Word

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

Bible readings for Sunday, May 24, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **May 24**

Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Sunday after Ascension: **Living in the power of God as those who are His**

Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 – The power of God the Lord Almighty

John 17:1-11 – Protected by the power of Jesus' name

Acts 1:6-14 – Jesus promises the empowering of the Holy Spirit

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 – We resist the devil in God's greater power

### Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 – The power of God the Lord Almighty

**Praise for God's might in historic acts and presence with us now**

1 May God arise, may His enemies be scattered; may His foes flee before Him.

*"May God arise" – the worshipping community praises God's glory going before them from Mount Sinai in the desert to Mount Zion in Jerusalem.*

• **For further study**, the song of Deborah, Judges 5, and scattering of God's enemies in Psalm 18.

2-3 May You blow them away like smoke – as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God. But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

*"The righteous... rejoice" – God's people. Early Christians saw Christ's resurrection, ascension and present rule foreshadowed, Ephesians 4:8-13.*

4 Sing to God, sing in praise of His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before Him – His name is the LORD.

*"His name is the Lord" – Yahweh. The psalm also uses: elohim God (v.1), adonai Lord (v.11), shaddai Almighty (v.14), yah elohim Lord God (v.18) and Yahweh Adonai God the Lord (v.20).*

5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.

*"A father to the fatherless" – God's character is to defend the defenceless. Knowing God as Father will*

*be brought out by Jesus, and in the NT generally.*

6 God sets the lonely in families, He leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

*"Sun-scorched" – barren, alienated from God.*

7-10 When You, God, went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness, the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. You gave abundant showers, O God; You refreshed Your weary inheritance. Your people settled in it, and from Your bounty, God, You provided for the poor.

*"Marched through the wilderness" – journey from Red Sea to the Promised Land.*

32-35 Sing to God, You kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, to Him who rides across the highest heavens, the ancient heavens, who thunders with mighty voice. Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the heavens. You, God, are awesome in Your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to His people. Praise be to God!

*"You kingdoms of the earth" – an appeal to all political powers to recognise God's heavenly rule.*

The Living Word for the next week, from Wednesday – [www.thelivingword.uk](http://www.thelivingword.uk)

Also constantly updated: [www.glowweobley.com](http://www.glowweobley.com) – how to pray at this time

[www.believethegoodnews.com](http://www.believethegoodnews.com) – focus on the good news, grow stronger

**REFLECTION** Israel's security from surrounding nations was in the power and strength given by God's presence, v.35. This psalm may have been composed by David when the Ark of the Covenant finally arrived at its permanent place of worship. Life's journey has threats and setbacks but the theme of the praise is clear. God is powerful and mighty but also caring, non-discriminatory and very fair.

**QUESTION** What are the 'milestones of gratitude' in your journey of life with Him?

### John 17:1-11 – Protected by the power of Jesus' name

#### Our security is in what Jesus has done for us and knowing the Father

1 After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You.

*"Jesus... looked toward heaven and prayed" – His longest recorded prayer.*

2 "For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him.

*"You granted... You have given" – this chapter emphasises God bestowing the path to salvation.*

3 "Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

*"Eternal life" – which starts the moment we enter a personal relationship with the Father through believing, trusting and receiving Jesus Christ.*

4 "I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do.

5 "And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.

*"The glory I had with You before" – which Jesus gave up to be born as man, Phil. 2:6-8. Part of the divine exchange in Jesus' death and resurrection was His shame transformed to exaltation and glory.*

6-8 "I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have

obeyed Your word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me.

*"They accepted... they knew... they believed" – unlike most of the Pharisees and religious leaders who heard Jesus' words without believing, the disciples had shown that they accepted Jesus' teaching, understood His divine origin, and had believed through a change of heart.*

9 "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours.

*"They are Yours" – those who accept Jesus and His message are born again into the family of God with the rights of His children.*

• **For further study:** John 1:12; 11:52; Romans 8:14-15; Galatians 4:5; Phil. 2:15; 1 John 3:1.

10 "All I have is Yours, and all You have is Mine. And glory has come to Me through them.

11 "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one."

*"Protect them... so that they may be one" – also vv.21, 23 which emphasise being brought into unity, a work of the Holy Spirit. Essential to continuing the work and witness of Jesus, unity would also be a target of spiritual attack, as today.*

**REFLECTION** Belonging to God through choosing to believe and receive Jesus is a privilege. The belonging is about new life in relationship with Him, but it also spells protection. The devil will do anything to try to spoil God's offer of salvation to those who believe in His Son, which is where the protection comes in. If Jesus prayed that we would have it, we need it! We may feel powerless against the forces behind

evil events, but we have been given the name of Jesus Christ – the Name that is above all names. We can try to live by our own power – or choose to overcome by His.

**QUESTION** When things are turning pear-shaped, how long does it take us to recall that we are in a relationship where God is committed to respond and help?

### Acts 1:6-14 – Jesus promises the empowering of the Holy Spirit

#### He reveals the truth about God and enables us to tell others

6 Then they gathered around Him and asked Him, "Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

*"Restore the kingdom" – first-century Jews longed for the restoration of David's kind of kingdom and believed the Messiah, a descendant of David, would do this. The kingdom Jesus spoke about was a spiritual kingdom, or rule, in the hearts and lives of believers. At Pentecost all would become clear.*

7-8 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

*"You will receive power... you will be My witnesses" – this verse summarises the story of Acts, and a task of unimaginable extent to these men. Acts describes the outward movement from Jerusalem of proclaiming salvation in Jesus in the power of the Spirit, to the known world.*

9 After He said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.

*"A cloud hid him" – indicating the drawing near of the presence of God, Exodus 40:34; Luke 9:34-36.*

10-11 They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly

**REFLECTION** The resurrection and ascension of Jesus was an enthronement – exalted to the highest place in heaven, yet remaining closer than ever to the believers by spiritual impartation. This is not a religion, but a relationship. Unlike a religion, it doesn't give us an agenda to live up to, but confers supernatural ability we didn't have before, to know God personally and live a renewed life. It is also "receiving power" to take the message to others – much needed by the early disciples moving out to other lands and cultures and facing murderous hostility at times. As we face political correctness, social breakdown and spiritual diversity, we need that power to live confidently for Jesus and make Him

two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven."

*"Two men dressed in white" – angels, also indicating heaven drawing near, foretell Jesus's return in clouds and glory, and in the same resurrection body, Matthew 24:30.*

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

*"Mount of Olives" – above Bethany and part of the "come back in the same way" statement.*

• **For further study,** see Zech. 14:1-15; Luke 9:26.

13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

*"Judas" – not Iscariot, but also known as Thaddeus.*

14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

*"Joined together constantly in prayer" – the Holy Spirit preparing them, bringing them into alignment with Him and hence unity with one another.*