

independent person – except that He wasn't.

"Righteous requirement of the law" – for the believer, not a path to salvation but a moral compass, internalised and followed out of love for God "according to the Spirit" as an enabling power in us.

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

"Live according to the flesh" – NLT rendering: "Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit."

6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

"Governed by the flesh" – The Message: "Obsession with self... is a dead end... the opposite of focusing on God."

7-8 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

REFLECTION Here Paul teaches how the power of the word is associated with the mind governed by the Spirit. With the Spirit of God indwelling, the believer in Jesus has a practical, realistic choice to live and think by the leading and enabling of the Spirit, and to say 'no' to what Paul calls the flesh, meaning the ego and selfish nature. This is the word – God's truth and the expression of the kingdom – working with the Holy Spirit in a life-giving way which transforms how we think and act. In Isaiah we saw God's general intention to revive and renew, and Matthew's account showed Jesus' mission in miniature in the story He told, of how to receive the word given and see it produce a harvest. Then Paul teaches on the personal renewal that comes by learning to be led by the Spirit – and pleasing God as we do.

QUESTION What unique gift or attribute does the Holy Spirit bring us? (vv. 2, 6, 10, 11)

PRAYER Lord God, at the beginning You spoke the world into existence by Your creative word. You have never stopped speaking, and Your word is a real force for bringing new life. May we be fertile soil for hearing Your word, agreeing with Your word and speaking it to each other and to You. Help us to partner with the work of Your Spirit in being a joyful, peace-bringing, life-giving force for You – and Your glory. Amen.

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

"Realm of the flesh... of the Spirit" – describes two mindsets, one with a bias towards sin and independence from God, the other renewed and with a bias towards living for God.

10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

"The Spirit of God... the Spirit of Christ... if Christ is in you" – the language is of the Trinity, one God existing in three persons. The Bible does not explicitly teach the doctrine of the Trinity but passages like this give clear evidence of it.

11 And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.

"He who raised Christ... life to your mortal bodies" – resurrection promised by the Holy Spirit whose presence is shown by Spirit-controlled life, vv. 4-9.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, July 12, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **July 12**

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

Theme: **Theme: How revival comes by Word and Spirit**

Isaiah 55:10-13 – God's word brings revival as we pray it back to Him

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 – Revival comes as disciples multiply Jesus' word

Romans 8:1-11 – Personal revival is having the mindset of the Spirit

and also Psalm 65:9-13

Isaiah 55:10-13 – God's word brings revival as we pray it back to Him

Our taking God at His word transforms us and brings joy and peace

10 "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater...

"Do not return without... making it... flourish" – a picture of rain falling and, v.11, "accomplishing" life and growth in returning to the clouds.

11 "...so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

"My word that goes out" – like a messenger, Isaiah 9:8; Psalm 107:20. With the sense of being flawless, Psalm 18:30.

"Will accomplish" – especially the promises of vv. 3, 5 and 12 and revealing God, whose ways are "higher", vv. 8-9 and His salvation in general.

"Achieve the purpose" – the kingdom of God in a saving relationship between God and man. It is

assumed we will not completely understand this (Isaiah himself was probably perplexed by the Suffering Servant) but salvation requires us to completely accept His "word".

• **For further study:** Isaiah 55:1-9, 52:13-53:12.

12 "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

"Go out... be led forth" – salvation is a joyful (not solemn or penitential) journey, in which all creation resonates. "In peace" – characteristic of the experience of salvation and relationship with God, unlike the wicked, Isaiah 48:22.

13 "Instead of the thorn-bush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD'S renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever."

"Instead of the thorn-bush... briars" – a reversal of the desolation Isaiah prophesied about earlier, Isaiah 5:6, 32:13. Revival blesses mankind but also enhances everything that lives.

REFLECTION This week's sequence of readings from OT to Gospel and then Letters gives us a clear progression from general to particular, and from 'doing' to 'being'. It offers us a 'helicopter view' of God's eternal purpose expressed by Isaiah, comes to earth with an excerpt of Jesus' kingdom mission and message from Matthew's gospel, and then moves to our response in Paul's teaching. "My word... will not return to Me empty" goes on to speak of this word coming like a messenger and accomplishing God's purpose. By itself? No, God always works in partnership, or covenant, with His people – people like us. That is a clue to the meaning of the word 'return', a kind

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of circular journey where God speaks, the word is heard and shared, and then returns to Him. But this is no echo. It is a picture of our cooperation, hearing the word, believing and agreeing with it, and praying it back. As we take hold of it and it becomes part of our expression of worship and intercession, so God's purpose unfolds. He is enthroned on our praise. His blessing becomes evident in joy and peace and renewal, right down to trees and the quality of the shrubs.

QUESTION What are different ways of God's word being returned to Him?

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 – Revival comes as Jesus' word grows in us

Like seed sown in good soil we grow truth into a harvest of others

1-2 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

"Sat by the lake" – the Cove of the Parables near Capernaum, one of a number on Galilee's shores, provided a natural acoustic for a crowd to hear.

3 Then He told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.

"In parables" – the Greek word parabolē means 'placing beside' and there are about 30 of these illustrative stories in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Other figures of speech are recorded in John. Parables taught a main point with additional meaning for serious enquirers, and made it difficult for Jesus' enemies to find grounds for accusation.

4 "As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

"Some fell along the path" – paths criss-crossed fields.

5-6 "Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

"Rocky places" – sowing was often carried out before cultivation, hence the variety in the soils.

7 "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

8 "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

"A hundred times" – like Isaac's blessed crop,

Genesis 26:12, far more than expected. True disciples will be supernaturally fruitful.

9 "Whoever has ears, let them hear.

"Whoever has ears" – a challenge to engage with the meaning and respond.

18 "Listen, then, to what the parable of the sower means:

"What the parable... means" – a rare instance of Jesus interpreting His own story.

19 "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

"The message about the kingdom" – or "the word of God", Luke 8:11.

"Does not understand" – in the sense of believing and understanding. The kingdom spiritual rule of Christ is discerned through faith.

20 "The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

"Falling on rocky ground" – like the hard ground of the path, vv.4, 19, there is no prepared "soil" for the message to take root, because of the rejection of hard-heartedness, or there is a shallow emotional response without any heart change.

21 "But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

"Last only a short time" – wanting the benefits of salvation without the cost of being a disciple.

22 "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness

of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

"Deceitfulness of wealth" – a theme in this gospel. God is not against wealth as long as we hold wealth lightly with faith, recognise the real treasure, and live accordingly.

• **For further study**, see Matthew 4:8-10, 6:24, 13:44-45; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17.

REFLECTION This well-known story told by Jesus is mis-named the Parable of the Sower. The focus of the story is not about where the seed – the word of God, the message of the kingdom – comes from, but the four kinds of soil where it tries to take root. Only one turns out to be a receptive environment for the seed to grow and multiply. Of the other three, the hard path depicts the hard-hearted, resistant person; the rocky soil is like the shallow individual; and the weed-choked area represents those preoccupied with priorities of life and success. The true disciples that Jesus is looking for are like prepared soil with enough emotional depth to receive the seed, and to nurture that truth growing in them. Like the three levels of resistance in the ill-prepared soils, the good earth will see different degrees of multiplication, but all will have the hallmark of the kingdom. This is about disciples making many more disciples, Matthew 28:19-20, and the early church and every revival since, has seen this kind of person-to-person exponential growth.

QUESTION What does it mean for us to be "one who produces a crop"?

Romans 8:1-11 – Personal revival is having the mindset of the Spirit

The way of thinking which begins and ends with ourselves is hostile to God

1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

"Therefore" – concluding the argument of ch. 5-7.

"Condemnation" – a legal word for facing the penalty of a guilty verdict; opposite of justification, Romans 5:1-2, 9, 18. The whole human race is under condemnation from having inherited Adam's sin, Romans 5:12-6:23; however, every believer in Jesus, although judged by the law to be guilty, Romans 7, is justified, declared free, owing to Christ's payment of the penalty in self-sacrifice.

"The law of the Spirit who gives life" – law in the

23 "But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

"Produces a crop" – unlike the three soils which produced none, now there are three levels of being supernaturally fruitful – the mark of true disciples.

sense of controlling power. Formerly this was the law, i.e. control, of sin, Romans 7:21, 25. Now for the believer the 'control' is the enabling and leading influence of the Holy Spirit.

3-4 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

"Law was powerless" – it could point out and condemn sin, but not enable us to live above it.

"Likeness of sinful flesh" – Christ was incarnated truly human and looking like any other self-centred,

Psalm 69:9-13

9 You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with, for so you have ordained it.

10 You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops.

11 You crown the year with Your bounty, and Your carts overflow with abundance.

12 The grasslands of the wilderness overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness.

13 The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.