



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

19 - 24 JULY 2021

## INTRODUCTION

This week we conclude our readings from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth and start a short series on the letter of James. As usual the text in bold type gives a focus for the day's Thought.

## MONDAY - 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

<sup>1</sup> I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me. <sup>2</sup> I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. <sup>5</sup> I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. <sup>6</sup> I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.

**<sup>7</sup> Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge? <sup>8</sup> I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. <sup>9</sup> And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way.** <sup>10</sup> As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. <sup>11</sup> And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

<sup>12</sup> And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about. <sup>13</sup> For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds.

## ***Thought for the day***

*One of the things Paul was criticised for was his refusal to accept financial support from the churches he founded. We read about how he worked as a tentmaker in Corinth (Acts 18:3) and here he reminds the Christians how he was maintained by other churches and friends (v9-10). It seems that his opponents used this as another example of how his behaviour and message were flawed, because it was expected that an itinerant missionary would be supported by those to whom he ministered. This may strike us as a point of little significance but it was clearly important to Paul, and even today there is a tendency, in the church and elsewhere, to treat professionals with greater respect than volunteers.*

## TUESDAY - 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

<sup>16</sup> I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool; but if you do, then accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. <sup>17</sup> What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool; <sup>18</sup> since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast. <sup>19</sup> For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! <sup>20</sup> For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. <sup>21</sup> To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. <sup>22</sup> Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. <sup>23</sup> Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, **in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters;** <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

<sup>30</sup> If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. <sup>31</sup> The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he for ever) knows that I do not lie. <sup>32</sup> In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas set a guard on the city of Damascus in order to seize me, <sup>33</sup> but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

### ***Thought for the day***

*Paul continues to argue the case for the validity of his ministry, shifting the ground to his similar background to those who criticise him (v22), and to the extent of the hardships he has endured in his determination to serve Christ. Note the nature of the dangers he lists (v26): some of them are those of any first century traveller (rivers, bandits, sea) but others imply constant threats wherever he was (city, wilderness) and whoever he associated with (Jews, Gentiles, false friends). We know from other letters and Acts that there is little exaggeration in what he writes here. It's in sharp contrast to what most of us have to put up with as Christians.*

### **WEDNESDAY - 2 Corinthians 12:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. <sup>3</sup> And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—<sup>4</sup> was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. <sup>5</sup> On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup> But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, <sup>7</sup> even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. **Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.** <sup>8</sup> **Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,** <sup>9</sup> **but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'** So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

<sup>11</sup> I have been a fool! You forced me to it. Indeed you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works. <sup>13</sup> How have you been worse off than the other churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

<sup>14</sup> Here I am, ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, because I do not want what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup> I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? <sup>16</sup> Let it be assumed that I did not burden you. Nevertheless (you say) since I was crafty, I took you in by deceit. <sup>17</sup> Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup> I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

<sup>19</sup> Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up. <sup>20</sup> For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. <sup>21</sup> I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may

have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practised.

## ***Thought for the day***

*This reading starts with a description of great interest, but also very hard to understand completely: Paul is almost certainly writing about an experience of his own but it's hard to tell whether it relates to his conversion or to some other incident (v1-4). He goes on to explain, again somewhat cryptically, about his 'thorn in the flesh', probably a health issue, and God's response to his repeated prayers for its removal (v7-8). Few people would accept that power is displayed, let alone 'made perfect,' in weakness (v9); yet this is precisely how Jesus demonstrated his own power over sin and death on the cross.*

## **THURSDAY - 2 Corinthians 13:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> This is the third time I am coming to you. 'Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses.' <sup>2</sup> I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient—  
<sup>3</sup> since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. <sup>4</sup> For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

<sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test! <sup>6</sup> I hope you will find out that we have not failed. <sup>7</sup> But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have passed the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup> For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. <sup>10</sup> So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

<sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

**<sup>13</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.**

## ***Thought for the day***

*Our readings from 2 Corinthians have been longer than usual and often present Paul at his polemical best (or worst). So it seems appropriate to finish by focusing on the last sentence of the letter, which contains the words of Paul that are used most frequently in church and elsewhere. The Grace (v13) is both simple and profound, setting out to comfort and encourage us with three of the most significant characteristics of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: grace, love and fellowship (communion). If only we would let our own lives as individuals and our church life together be fully inhabited by these virtues, might we not be more fulfilled and happier?*

## **FRIDAY - James 1:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

**<sup>2</sup> My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; <sup>4</sup> and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.**

<sup>5</sup> If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. <sup>6</sup> But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; <sup>7, 8</sup> for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, <sup>10</sup> and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.

## **Thought for the day**

*In the letters of Paul we learn a lot about him - about his life experiences, his attitudes, his fellow Christians and his faith in Jesus Christ. So the transition from 2 Corinthians to James' only surviving letter is interesting. Paul was writing to a specific church, with mainly Gentile members, and with clear and distinctive issues. James writes more generally, and principally to Jewish Christians living outside Judea (v1). But he too wants to offer encouragement to those who suffer persecution, or perhaps ostracism from their Jewish community. He suggests that such 'trials' should be welcomed (v2) because they are the route through endurance to a fuller faith (v3-4). Most of us will experience challenges to our own faith, in many diverse ways. How do we react to such challenges? How can we turn what seems like a harmful influence into a positive outcome?*

## **SATURDAY - James 1:12-27**

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; <sup>15</sup> then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. <sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved.

<sup>17</sup> Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup> In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

<sup>19</sup> You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. <sup>21</sup> Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

**<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.** <sup>23</sup> For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. <sup>25</sup> But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

<sup>26</sup> If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

## **Thought for the day**

*The advice James gives is highly compressed, dealing today with the nature of temptation and sin (v12-16), God as the source of all that is good (v17-18), and the dangers of anger through not listening to others (v19-21). This last seems highly relevant to our own world of strongly polarised opinions, expressed with little regard for the feelings of those with whom we disagree. But then James' argument moves into the area for which he has often been criticised and considered to be in contention with Paul (wrongly, in my view, on both counts): it is not possible to hear and accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ without responding in gratitude and becoming 'doers of the word' (v22). The examples he gives of what this means are instructive: no gossip or bad words (v26), caring for the vulnerable, and living well (v23). What might we want to add to that list?*