

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 64 OF 104

Inside the Cup

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Isaiah 1-5
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 74-76
Gospels	Luke 11:33-12:21
General New Testament	Colossians 1:1-2:5

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to move your class from the outside of the cup to the inside. Isaiah shows a nation with flawless worship attendance and bloody hands. Jesus, at a dinner table and then in front of a crowd, names the gap between the visible life and the actual one, and then tells about a successful man whose whole plan had no God in it. Asaph stands in a burned sanctuary and remembers who governs the world. Paul prays, not for a better-looking church, but for one that bears fruit. By Sunday your students should be able to name the room in their own house that has never been cleaned.

Doctrinally, two great matters converge. Isaiah 2:2-4 and Colossians 1:13 together settle the question of the kingdom: the mountain of the Lord's house was established in the last days, in Jerusalem, and Christians have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's Son. Teach that clearly and it will guard your class through the rest of the prophets. Then hold Colossians 1:15-20 high. Christ is Creator, head of the church, and first in everything, which is the only sufficient answer to every teaching that offers Jesus plus something. Note also the "if" of 1:23; reconciliation is God's work, and continuing in it is ours.

Formationally, the thread is fruit. God cleared a hillside and planted a choice vine and looked for grapes. Paul prays for a church fruitful in every good work. Jesus asks about the inside of a cup and about a barn with nothing in the account with God. Put this to your class directly: if the Lord walked through your week the way the owner walked through his vineyard, what would He find growing, and what one thing will you plant before next Sunday?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Luke 11:33-12:21. It is the sharpest and most personal reading of the four and it sets the week's theme in a single image. Give the last fifteen minutes to the rich fool, and have someone read 12:17-19 out loud while the class counts the pronouns.

Second session: Take up Colossians 1:1-2:5. Read 1:13-20 aloud before discussing anything, and settle the kingdom question from verse 13 while the class still has Isaiah 2 in mind from their own reading. Leave time for the conditional in 1:23.

The other two readings: Isaiah 1-5 and Psalms 74-76 belong to private reading, with one instruction each. Tell the class to read Isaiah 1:11-17 as though it were addressed to this congregation, and to read Psalm 74 slowly enough to notice how the psalmist turns his complaint into remembering. Both will make session one land harder.

The Vineyard That Disappointed**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

Isaiah preached for roughly half a century, through four kings, while Assyria grew into a monster on the northern horizon. His first five chapters set out the whole indictment in miniature. Verse 3 is the wound: the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, My people do not consider. The problem is not that they have stopped attending. The problem is that they attend beautifully and do not know whose house they are in.

Read 1:11–15 slowly with your class, because it is one of the most alarming passages in the Old Testament. God is not rejecting pagan worship; He is rejecting the sacrifices, new moons, and appointed feasts He Himself prescribed. Bring no more futile sacrifices. My soul hates them. When you spread out your hands I will hide My eyes. Why? Verse 15: your hands are full of blood. Worship offered by people who are devouring the widow and the orphan is not worship at all, and God says so in the strongest words He has.

Then, without warning, mercy: come now, let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow. Chapter 2 lifts the horizon to a day when the Lord's house is established above the hills and the nations stream in to be taught, which the New Testament identifies with the church. And chapter 5 closes the loop with the song of the vineyard: a hillside cleared, planted with the choicest vine, fenced, towered, given a winepress, and yielding worthless grapes. The Lord asks the only fair question in the book: what more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Isaiah prophesied in Judah roughly 740 to 700 B.C., during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1), with Assyria rising and the northern kingdom about to fall.
- Chapters 1 through 5 function as an overture: indictment, invitation, the glory of the last days, judgment on pride, and the song of the vineyard.
- Isaiah 1:10 addresses Judah as “rulers of Sodom” and “people of Gomorrah,” a deliberate insult that shows how far the nation had drifted while keeping the calendar of feasts.
- “The last days” in prophetic usage means the final age of God's dealing with man, the Christian age, which Peter says began at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–17).
- The vineyard image recurs throughout Scripture (Psalm 80; Jeremiah 2:21; Matthew 21:33–43; John 15), and Jesus uses it against the same kind of leadership.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Isaiah 1:11–17 God says He cannot endure worship that He Himself commanded. How does worship become something God hates, and where is that danger for a congregation like ours?*

Make the point precisely so the class does not hear it wrongly. God is not saying the forms were unimportant; He commanded them. He is saying that the forms without the life are offensive to Him, and offensive in proportion to how carefully they are performed. Verse 15 gives the reason in six words: your hands are full of blood. Amos 5:21–24 and Micah 6:6–8 say the same thing, and 1 Samuel 15:22 said it first.

Now bring it home without descending into vague self-criticism. Ask where worship could be done exactly right at our building and still be hateful to God: a man who leads a prayer and has not spoken to his brother in two years, a family that takes the Supper and has a reputation for ruthlessness in business, a congregation that sings well and never notices the widow in the back. Isaiah 1:16–17 gives God's remedy and it is entirely practical: wash, put away evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Question 2. *Isaiah 2:2-4 promises that in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house will be established and all nations will flow to it. When was that fulfilled, and what difference does your answer make to how you read the rest of the prophets?*

Answer this one plainly. The mountain of the Lord's house established in the top of the mountains, with all nations flowing to it, the law going forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, came to pass when the church was established in Jerusalem on Pentecost. Peter began that day by quoting Joel about "the last days" (Acts 2:16-17), the word went out from Jerusalem exactly as Isaiah said, and men of every nation under heaven heard it. Hebrews 12:22-23 tells Christians they have already come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the firstborn.

The difference it makes is enormous, and this is the week to say so. If Isaiah 2 is still future, then the prophets become a calendar for political events in the Middle East, and the church becomes a temporary detour. If Isaiah 2 is fulfilled, then every Christian sitting in your class is standing inside the answer to a seven-hundred-year-old prophecy. Daniel 2:44 said the kingdom would be set up in the days of those kings, Mark 9:1 said some standing there would see it come with power, and Colossians 1:13, which you will read this same week, says believers have already been conveyed into it.

Question 3. *In Isaiah 5:1-7 God lists everything He did for His vineyard and then shows what it produced. Take inventory out loud: what has God invested in us, and what is He looking for in return?*

Walk through what the owner did: he chose a fruitful hill, dug it up, cleared out the stones, planted the choicest vine, built a tower in the middle, and hewed out a winepress. Every one of those is labor and expense, and every one of them says he expected a harvest worth protecting. Then verse 7 names the vineyard: the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant. He looked for justice and found oppression, for righteousness and heard a cry.

Take the inventory seriously in the room. A congregation in this country has Scripture in a dozen translations, a building, teachers, elders, decades of preaching, freedom to assemble, and more material provision than most Christians in history. Ask what fruit God has a right to expect from that investment, and then ask what He is getting. Verse 4 is the question to leave hanging: what more could have been done that He has not done?

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the six woes of Isaiah 5:8-23 and put each one into a sentence of your own. Which of the six lands closest to your own life?*

Woe to those who join house to house and field to field until they live alone in the land (greed that consumes neighbors); woe to those who rise early to chase strong drink and whose feasts have no regard for God's work (pleasure that crowds out God); woe to those who drag sin along with cart ropes and dare God to hurry up (defiant scoffing); woe to those who call evil good and good evil (moral inversion); woe to those who are wise in their own eyes (self-sufficiency); and woe to heroes at drinking who justify the wicked for a bribe (corrupt courage). Answers on which one lands closest will vary; the fourth and fifth are the ones our culture teaches.

2. *Isaiah 1:18 offers to make scarlet sins white as snow. Read 1:16-20 and write down the commands that come immediately before and after that offer.*

Before the offer: wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. After the offer: if you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and rebel you shall be devoured by the sword. The famous invitation sits between two calls to repentance, which is exactly how God always offers pardon.

3. *Compare Isaiah 2:2-4 with Micah 4:1-3, Acts 2:16-17, and Hebrews 12:22-23. Where did the mountain of the Lord's house finally come to stand, and who flows to it?*

Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, records nearly the same words, which shows God was pressing this promise on the nation from two pulpits. Acts 2:16-17 identifies the last days as beginning at Pentecost, and the word of the Lord did

go out from Jerusalem that day to men from every nation. Hebrews 12:22–23 tells Christians they have come to Zion, to the city of the living God, to the church. The mountain of the Lord's house is the church of Christ, and the nations flow into it through the gospel.

4. *Trace what Isaiah 3:1–15 says God will remove from a nation and what He will put in its place. According to the text, what brings that judgment on?*

God removes the stock and the store, the mighty man, the soldier, the judge, the prophet, the elder, the captain, the counselor, the skilled craftsman, and the eloquent orator, and He replaces them with children and capricious rulers. Verse 8 gives the cause: Jerusalem stumbled and Judah fell because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord. Verses 12 through 15 add that the leaders themselves have eaten up the vineyard and ground the faces of the poor. Bad leadership is described as both the sin and the punishment.

5. *Isaiah 1:17 gives five commands about the oppressed, the fatherless, and the widow. Pick the one you have most neglected and do something about it this week with an actual name attached.*

Answers will vary. Push past sympathy to logistics. Defending the fatherless might mean becoming a foster parent or supporting one; pleading for the widow might mean an afternoon of yard work and a standing Thursday phone call. Ask for the name and the day.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Isaiah 2:2–4 is fulfilled in the church, established in Jerusalem in the last days (Acts 2:16–17; Hebrews 12:22–23). Do not allow it to be read as a future earthly political kingdom or a millennial reign. This is your best opportunity in the block to settle it.
- Isaiah 1:18 is not a promise of pardon apart from repentance. Verses 16 through 20 fence it on both sides. Pardon is free, and it is never unconditional.
- The sacrifices, feasts, and new moons of chapter 1 belonged to a covenant now fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10). Draw the abiding principle about worship and the heart; do not bind the Old Covenant calendar on Christians.
- Isaiah 3:16–24 addresses the proud finery of the daughters of Zion. Teach the principle about ostentation and pride with care, aim it at both men and women, and do not let it become an hour about hemlines.

When the Sanctuary Burns

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These three psalms belong to Asaph and they work as a sequence. Psalm 74 is a national lament from people standing in the ruins of the temple. The details are specific and awful: enemies roaring in the place of the assembly, setting up their own banners as signs, breaking the carved paneling with axes and hammers, burning the sanctuary to the ground, and burning every meeting place in the land. Then verse 9: no signs, no prophet, nobody who knows how long. Silence from heaven is harder to bear than noise from the enemy.

Watch what he does with that silence. Verse 12 pivots on one word: yet. For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. And then he rehearses the Red Sea, the springs and the floods, the day and the night, the summer and winter. He does not feel better; he remembers better. His argument for the future is entirely built out of the past, and the last section of the psalm asks God to remember His own covenant and His own name.

Psalm 75 answers, and it answers in God's voice. When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly. The earth may be dissolving, but God holds up its pillars. Do not lift up your horn on high, do not speak with a stiff neck, because promotion is not east, west, or south; God is the Judge, He puts down one and exalts another. And there is a cup in His hand. Psalm 76 then celebrates the outcome: in Judah God is known, and there He broke the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle. The three psalms move from smoke to confession to song.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 73 through 83 are attributed to Asaph, David's chief musician, and to the guild of temple singers that carried his name for generations (1 Chronicles 16:4–5; 2 Chronicles 29:30).
- Psalm 74 almost certainly reflects the Babylonian destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8–10), which means an Asaphite wrote it long after Asaph himself.
- Psalm 74 is a community lament: complaint, remembrance of God's mighty acts, petition, and appeal to God's own name.
- The sea monsters and Leviathan of 74:13–14 are poetic images for the chaotic powers God defeated, and here specifically for Egypt at the Red Sea. The Psalter borrows the imagery without endorsing pagan mythology.
- Psalm 76 is a song of Zion, celebrating God's defense of Jerusalem, and many connect it with the destruction of Sennacherib's army in 2 Kings 19:35.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 74:9 says, "We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long." Talk honestly about what praying feels like in a season like that, and watch what the psalmist does next in verses 12 through 17.*

Let the class feel the honesty of verse 9 before you rush to fix it. There are seasons when nothing is happening, no answer comes, no sign appears, and nobody can tell you how long it will last. Christians often think that admitting this is unbelief. The Psalter thinks it is prayer. Notice that the psalmist is not asking why the Babylonians are strong; he is asking why God has cast off the sheep of His own pasture, and how long the enemy will blaspheme His name.

Then watch the method in verses 12 through 17, because it is the most practical thing in the psalm. He does not manufacture a feeling. He recites history: God divided the sea, God broke the heads of the monsters, God opened the fountains, God established the light and the sun, God set the borders of the earth. When you cannot see what

God is doing now, rehearse what He has done. Ask the class what their own list would contain, and suggest they write it down before the next hard season rather than during it.

Question 2. *Psalm 75:6–7 says exaltation comes neither from the east nor the west but from God, who puts down one and lifts up another. How would actually believing that change the way you handle being passed over, overlooked, or replaced?*

Verse 6 rules out three directions and leaves only one: up. The east, the west, and the south cover the trade routes and the political alliances, all the places a man might look for advancement. Promotion comes from God. That cuts two ways, and your class needs both. It kills the flattery, maneuvering, and self-promotion by which people climb; and it comforts the person who has been passed over by someone less qualified and less honest.

Make the application concrete and personal. Somebody in your class was not chosen. Somebody watched a job go to a man who lied about him. Somebody has served quietly for twenty years while other people were thanked. Psalm 75 does not promise that the score gets settled this quarter, but it does promise a Judge with a cup in His hand and a proper time of His own choosing. Ask what a person does with his hands and his mouth in the meantime; verse 1 answers, we give thanks.

Question 3. *Psalm 76 says God is known in Judah and that His name is great in Israel. What does it mean for God to be known in a particular place, and what are people in our town currently learning about God from this congregation?*

To be known in a place means that God has acted there in a way people can point to. In Judah, He was known because He broke the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle, and because the stouthearted men of war woke up unable to find their hands. Israel did not have to argue for God; something had happened that required explaining.

Turn the question toward your own town. What do people who have never walked into your building actually know about God from this church? Usually the answer is whatever they know about the members: how they treat employees, whether they keep their word, whether they showed up when a neighbor's husband died. That is how God becomes known in a place. Ask for one thing the congregation could do this year that would make its neighbors need an explanation.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Psalm 74:3–8 says the enemy did inside the sanctuary. Then note in verse 1 and verse 10 what troubles the psalmist even more than the damage.*

The enemy roared in the place of the assembly, set up their own banners as signs, swung axes as though clearing trees, broke down the carved work with hatchets and hammers, set fire to the sanctuary, defiled the dwelling place of God's name, and burned up all the meeting places of God in the land. But verse 1 and verse 10 show what hurts worse: the fear that God has cast off His own people forever, and the fact that the enemy is blaspheming God's name and God appears to be doing nothing about it.

2. *Psalm 74:12–17 turns from complaint to memory. Write down each of God's past acts named there, and explain why he rehearses them at this particular moment.*

God is King from of old, working salvation in the earth; He divided the sea by His strength; He broke the heads of the sea monsters; He crushed Leviathan and gave him as food; He opened the fountain and the flood and dried up mighty rivers; the day and the night are His; He prepared the light and the sun; He set all the borders of the earth and made summer and winter. He rehearses them precisely because nothing is visible in the present. Memory is the raw material of faith, and this is why Israel was told over and over to remember.

3. *Psalm 75:8 describes a cup of foaming wine in the Lord's hand. Compare Jeremiah 25:15–17 and Revelation 14:10, and describe what the cup stands for.*

The cup in God's hand is the cup of His wrath, poured out in judgment. Jeremiah is told to take the wine cup of fury and make the nations drink it, beginning with Jerusalem itself. Revelation 14:10 warns of drinking the wine of the

wrath of God poured full strength. The image is sobering and should be handled soberly: the same Lord who offers a cup of blessing at His table holds a cup of judgment for those who refuse Him.

4. *Trace the requests in Psalm 74:18–23 and identify the psalmist's main argument for why God should act. Notice whose reputation he appeals to.*

He asks God to remember that the enemy has reproached, to not forget the life of His poor forever, to have respect to the covenant, to not let the oppressed return ashamed, to arise and plead His own cause. The chief argument is not Israel's worthiness but God's name and God's covenant: it is Your cause, Your enemies, Your name being reproached. That is how the great prayers of the Old Testament are built (compare Exodus 32:11–13; Daniel 9:17–19).

5. *Psalm 76:11 says to make vows to the Lord your God and pay them. Identify one promise you made to God and quietly let go of, and do what is needed this week to keep it.*

Answers will vary. Common examples are a pledge of money, a promise to teach a class, a commitment to a family member made during a crisis, a vow made in a hospital waiting room. Listen for people who need help finishing something rather than shame for having stopped.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 74 is a lament from real ruins. Do not rush the class past the complaint to the comfort; teaching people to pray honestly is part of teaching them to pray at all.
- The Leviathan and sea-monster language of 74:13–14 is poetic imagery for God's defeat of Egypt and chaos, not an endorsement of Canaanite mythology. Say it briefly and move on.
- Psalm 74:22–23 and similar lines are appeals to God to act as Judge, not permission for personal revenge (Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23).
- Psalm 75:8 and the cup of wrath should be taught plainly. God's judgment is real, and a class that only hears about His kindness is not being told the truth (Romans 11:22).

The Outside of the Cup

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This section is one long exposure. It opens with a lamp: nobody lights one and hides it, and the eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is good the whole body is full of light. Jesus is talking about what a person lets in and what a person is on the inside, and He is about to demonstrate it at a dinner table.

The dinner goes badly on purpose. Jesus omits the ceremonial hand-washing, and when His host is astonished He names the disease: you clean the outside of the cup, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. The six woes that follow are not a loss of temper. They are a diagnosis, and each names a gap between the visible and the actual: herbs tithed to the leaf while justice is stepped over; the best seats and the marketplace greetings; graves that look like ordinary ground and defile whoever walks over them; and scholars who load men with burdens they will not touch and lock away the key of knowledge.

Then Jesus turns to His disciples and warns them first: beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Everything hidden will be revealed. Do not fear the ones who can only kill the body; fear the One with authority over hell. You are worth more than many sparrows and the hairs of your head are numbered. And then, when a man in the crowd tries to use Him to settle an inheritance, Jesus warns against covetousness and tells about a farmer whose land yielded plentifully, who talked the whole matter over with himself, and who heard a voice at the end of the story calling him a fool.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Ceremonial hand-washing before meals was rabbinic tradition, not a requirement of the Law of Moses. Jesus is not dismissing hygiene or Scripture, but a human rule treated as divine.
- Tithing mint, rue, and every herb was scrupulous beyond requirement. Jesus does not condemn the tithing (“these you ought to have done”), but the selective conscience.
- Contact with a grave rendered a Jew ceremonially unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:16), so an unmarked grave was a hidden contamination. The insult in 11:44 is precise.
- Luke 12:1 says the crowd was so dense they trampled one another, and Jesus began by speaking to His disciples first. The warning about hypocrisy is aimed at insiders.
- Rabbis were often asked to arbitrate inheritance disputes. Jesus refuses the role and goes after the motive instead, which is the only time He is recorded doing so.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Luke 11:39–41 Jesus says the Pharisees wash the outside of the cup while the inside is full of greed. Where does that pattern show up in a faithful, church-attending person, and what would cleaning the inside actually involve?*

Name the pattern carefully, because a church class will assume it applies to somebody else. The Pharisee was not a hypocrite in the modern sense of a man who does not believe what he says. He believed it intensely. His problem was that he had a detailed, demanding, measurable religion for the parts of life that other people can see, and no comparable attention to greed, which nobody can see. Jesus says the same God made both the outside and the inside (11:40).

The version in our pews looks like this: perfect attendance and a marriage nobody would want to be in; sound doctrine and a temper the family walks around; generous giving and a habit of cutting people down in private; a spotless reputation and a browser history. Cleaning the inside is not a mystery. It begins with confession to God

and usually to a person, and it continues with the specific, unglamorous work of dealing with greed, anger, or lust where it lives. Ask what would change first if the inside of the cup were the part we cared about most.

Question 2. *Jesus calls hypocrisy leaven and says nothing covered will remain hidden (12:1–3). Why does hypocrisy spread through a person and through a congregation the way yeast spreads through dough, and what stops it?*

Leaven is the right image for three reasons: it works invisibly, it works slowly, and a very small amount changes the whole lump. Hypocrisy spreads inside a person because every concealment requires more concealment, and it spreads through a congregation because people imitate what is rewarded. If a church only ever praises the appearance of godliness, it will manufacture the appearance of godliness.

What kills it is verses 2 and 3: nothing is covered that will not be revealed. Jesus does not offer a technique; He offers a fact. Everything comes out, if not now then at the judgment, and living now in the light of that fact is the cure. Practically it means a congregation where people can say true things about themselves without being destroyed, where leaders admit failures, and where confession is normal (James 5:16). Ask the class whether this church is a safe place to be honest, and take the answer seriously.

Question 3. *The rich man in 12:15–21 does nothing illegal, cruel, or lazy. Why then does God call him a fool, and how would you know if you were living the same way?*

Notice what the man did not do. He did not steal the harvest, cheat his workers, or refuse to work. He got a good crop and made a plan a business school would praise: expand capacity, secure the assets, retire early. God calls him a fool for two reasons the parable makes explicit. First, he assumed he owned time. This night your soul will be required of you. Second, he was not rich toward God; his entire soliloquy contains no God, no neighbor, and no one in need.

The diagnostic for your class: read verses 17 through 19 out loud and count the pronouns. Then ask each person to imagine describing their own financial plan out loud and notice whether God or any other human being appears in it. The rich fool is not a warning against saving, insurance, or planning. He is a warning against a life in which the increase goes entirely into a bigger barn and never once into the kingdom or into somebody else's need.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the six woes of Luke 11:42–52 and write one sentence for each saying what is actually being condemned. Note which ones concern religious leaders specifically.*

Woe for tithing herbs while passing over justice and the love of God (a conscience that is meticulous where it is easy); woe for loving the best seats and public greetings (religion as social standing); woe for being like unmarked graves (hidden corruption that defiles others unawares); woe to the lawyers for loading men with burdens they will not touch (leaders who demand what they do not carry); woe for building the prophets' tombs while sharing their fathers' hearts (honoring dead prophets and killing living ones); and woe for taking away the key of knowledge (keeping people from Scripture). The last three are aimed at the scholars and teachers.

2. *Read Luke 11:34–36 about the lamp of the body. Compare Matthew 6:22–23, where the same saying sits beside teaching about money, and describe what a good eye and a bad eye meant to a Jewish hearer.*

A good eye in Jewish idiom meant a generous, single, undivided outlook; a bad or evil eye meant a stingy, grudging one (compare Proverbs 22:9 and 28:22; Deuteronomy 15:9). In Matthew the saying sits between treasure in heaven and the impossibility of serving God and money, which tells you the subject. What you do with money is a window into whether the whole body is full of light or darkness.

3. *Jesus says to fear the One who has power to cast into hell (12:4–5). Read Matthew 10:28 and Hebrews 10:31, then explain how that fear fits together with 1 John 4:18.*

The fear commanded here is reverent dread of the God who has authority beyond death. Hebrews 10:31 says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and that warning is addressed to Christians. First John 4:18 speaks of the fear of punishment being cast out by love in the one who abides in Him; a child who trusts his father is not terrified of him, yet he still takes him seriously. Both are true: reverence toward God and confidence in His love grow together rather than at each other's expense.

4. Count the times the rich man says “I” or “my” in 12:17–19. Who is missing from the conversation entirely, and what does the arithmetic of his speech reveal?

He uses “I” or “my” roughly eleven times in three verses: my crops, my barns, my goods, my soul. God is absent, neighbors are absent, the poor are absent, and even his own death is absent from his calculations. He holds a board meeting with himself and votes unanimously. The parable’s literary joke is that the first other voice in the story is God’s, and it comes too late for him to answer.

5. Jesus names the alternative in 12:21: being rich toward God. Decide on one specific thing you will do this month with money you had planned to store, and do it before the month ends.

Answers will vary. Push for a number and a deadline. Being rich toward God in this context means converting what would have been stored into something God values: a benevolent need met, a preacher supported, a family carried through a hard month. The man in the parable had options and never considered one of them.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Luke 11:41 does not teach that giving alms purchases forgiveness. Jesus is saying that generosity from the heart is the opposite of the greed inside the cup, and that a cleansed inside makes everything clean.
- Take Luke 12:5 at face value. Hell is real and Jesus taught it more than anyone else in Scripture. Teach it soberly, without relish, and without softening it.
- Luke 12:11–12 promises the Holy Spirit will supply words to those disciples when hauled before rulers, part of the miraculous provision that confirmed the word in that generation (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). It is not a promise that Christians today need not study or prepare (2 Timothy 2:15).
- The rich fool is not a condemnation of wealth, saving, or planning. Abraham, Job, and Lydia were people of means. The sin named in 12:15 is covetousness, and the sin named in 12:21 is having a full barn and an empty account with God.

First in Everything

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Paul had never visited Colosse. The church there had been taught by Epaphras, and now a mixture of error was moving through it: Jewish ceremonial rules, worship of angels, self-imposed severity toward the body, and a promise of secret higher knowledge. Paul does not begin by attacking any of it. He begins by praying, and the prayer itself is the answer: that they be filled with the knowledge of His will, so that they walk worthy, bear fruit, increase in the knowledge of God, are strengthened with all might for patience with joy, and give thanks to the Father.

Then verses 13 and 14, which every member of your class should be able to quote. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Both verbs are past tense. The transfer has happened. Christians do not stand outside the kingdom waiting for it to be established; they live in it, under a reigning King, with their sins forgiven.

Verses 15 through 20 answer everything the false teachers were selling. Christ is the image of the invisible God; all things in heaven and earth were created through Him; He is before all things and in Him all things hold together; He is the head of the body, the church; He is the firstborn from the dead, first in all things; in Him all the fullness dwells; and through the blood of His cross God reconciles. If Christ is all that, angels are not to be worshiped and secret knowledge is not for sale. The cure for error is not mainly argument. It is a bigger view of Christ.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Colosse was a declining town in the Lycus valley of Asia Minor. Paul writes from prison, probably Rome, around A.D. 61–63, at the same period as Ephesians and Philemon.
- Epaphras planted the church and brought Paul the report (1:7–8; 4:12–13). Paul had not met most of these Christians face to face (2:1).
- The error at Colosse combined Jewish ceremonial observance, veneration of angels, ascetic rules, and claims of superior knowledge. Paul answers all of it with the sufficiency of Christ.
- “Firstborn” in Hebrew usage denotes rank and right of inheritance, not chronological origin. Psalm 89:27 makes David firstborn though he was the youngest of eight.
- Colossians 1:18 identifies the body as the church, and 1:13 identifies the kingdom as a present possession. Those two verses together shape how a Christian reads the rest of the prophets.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Colossians 1:13 says God has already delivered us and conveyed us into the kingdom of His Son. Talk about what that past tense settles, and what it means for a Christian to be living inside the kingdom right now.*

The verbs carry the doctrine. Delivered: rescued, the word used of snatching someone out of danger. Conveyed: transferred, the term used when a conquering power moved a whole population into a new territory. Both are completed action. Paul is telling ordinary Christians in a small town in Asia Minor that they have already been moved, and that the kingdom they now inhabit belongs to the Son whom God loves.

Say plainly what this settles. There is no earthly kingdom still awaiting establishment. Daniel 2:44 placed it in the days of the Roman kings, Mark 9:1 placed it within the lifetime of the hearers, Acts 2 records its coming with power, and Colossians 1:13 speaks of it as accomplished. Then ask the harder question: if we are already in the

kingdom and Christ is already reigning, what should change about how a Christian carries himself through a week? Citizens of a reigning King do not live like refugees waiting for a rumor to come true.

Question 2. Read 1:15–20 aloud and list every claim it makes about Christ. Which of those claims most collides with the way people around us think about Jesus?

Have someone read it slowly and put the claims on the board: image of the invisible God; firstborn over all creation, that is, heir and sovereign of it; creator of all things visible and invisible, thrones and dominions included; the one for whom everything was made; before all things; the one in whom all things hold together; head of the body, the church; the beginning; firstborn from the dead; first in everything; the dwelling place of all the fullness; the one who reconciles by the blood of His cross. That is the highest Christology in Paul, and it is written to a church rattled by people offering supplements.

Then ask which claim collides hardest with the thinking around us. Usually it is two: that He is the Creator rather than a wise teacher, and that He has the preeminence, that is, first place in everything, rather than a respected place alongside our other loyalties. Jesus as an admired figure is welcome nearly everywhere. Jesus as the One who made you, holds you together, and expects first place is not. Ask each person to name what currently competes for the first slot.

Question 3. Colossians 1:21–23 says we are reconciled and presented holy, “if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast.” What does that “if” do to the way we think and talk about being secure?

Do not soften the conditional, and do not use it to frighten people either. Paul writes to Christians already reconciled, already headed toward being presented holy, blameless, and above reproach, and then attaches the condition: if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel. Reconciliation is God’s work and it is complete; remaining in it is our responsibility and it is real.

Put it alongside Hebrews 3:12–14, Hebrews 10:26–31, Galatians 5:4, and 2 Peter 2:20–22, and it becomes clear that the New Testament expects Christians to continue and warns them against not continuing. This does not produce anxiety in a faithful believer; it produces seriousness. The security of a Christian rests on Christ, and the way we stay in Christ is to keep holding on to Him. Ask what “grounded and steadfast” looks like in practice for someone under pressure at work or in a family that ridicules his faith.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. List every request in Paul’s prayer in 1:9–12. How many of them concern knowledge, how many concern conduct, and how do the two relate?

Paul asks that they be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that they walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him; that they be fruitful in every good work; that they increase in the knowledge of God; that they be strengthened with all might according to His glorious power; that they have all patience and longsuffering with joy; and that they give thanks to the Father. Roughly two requests concern knowledge and the rest concern living, and the order shows the relationship: knowing God’s will exists so that a life can be lived, and living it increases the knowing.

2. Christ is called “firstborn over all creation” in 1:15 and “firstborn from the dead” in 1:18. Compare Psalm 89:27 and Revelation 1:5, then read 1:16–17 and John 1:3 and explain whether firstborn can mean that Christ was created.

Firstborn is a title of rank and inheritance. Psalm 89:27 says of David, the eighth and youngest son of Jesse, “I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth,” which proves the word does not mean first in time. Revelation 1:5 uses it of Christ as ruler over the kings of the earth. Colossians 1:16 settles the question anyway: all things were created by Him and for Him, and John 1:3 says without Him nothing was made that was made. The Creator of all things is not one of the things created.

3. Trace every occurrence of “all” and “every” in 1:15–20 and again in 1:28. Write down what the repetition is doing to Paul’s argument against the Colossian error.

All things created (v. 16, twice), all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, all thrones and dominions, before all things, in Him all things consist, in all things preeminent, all the fullness dwelling in Him, all things reconciled; and

then in 1:28, warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom, presenting every man perfect. The drumbeat is the point. Against teachers offering an inner circle with extra content for a select few, Paul insists that Christ is everything and that everything the church needs is preached to everybody.

4. *Colossians 1:26–27 says the mystery now revealed is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Read Ephesians 3:3–6 and state in your own words what the mystery was and why it had been hidden.*

The mystery is not something mysterious but something previously undisclosed and now made known: that Gentiles are fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of God’s promise in Christ through the gospel. “Christ in you” is written to a largely Gentile congregation and is itself the astonishing part. What prophets glimpsed and could not explain, God has now revealed and put on public preaching, and it is the hope of glory for people who once had no covenant at all.

5. *Paul prays in 1:10 that they walk worthy, fully pleasing Him, fruitful in every good work. Name the one good work you have been meaning to start for a year, and begin it this week.*

Answers will vary. Listen for something already identified and long postponed: teaching a class, visiting the nursing home, inviting a neighbor, writing the letter. Paul does not pray for vague improvement; he prays for fruit in every good work, and fruit is countable.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- “Firstborn over all creation” must be handled carefully, since some groups use it to deny Christ’s deity. Teach the meaning of the term from Psalm 89:27 and let 1:16–17 answer the question.
- Colossians 1:13 is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament that the kingdom is present and entered. Use it plainly against premillennial teaching, and gently toward those who have been taught it.
- Colossians 1:23 is conditional, and 1:20 does not teach universal salvation. Reconciliation is offered to all and received by those who come to Christ on His terms and continue in Him.
- Colossians 1:24, where Paul fills up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, refers to the sufferings still to be borne by Christ’s body in preaching the gospel, not to any deficiency in the atonement. Say so before someone asks.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Isaiah 6–10 • Psalm 77 • Luke 12:22–59 • Colossians 2:6–4:18

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