

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 69 OF 104

Trust and Treasure

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Isaiah 33–38
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 84–85
Gospels	Luke 16
General New Testament	2 Thessalonians 1–3

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to put the class in front of one plain question: what are you actually leaning on? Hezekiah leaned on God when the armies of the world were at the wall. The pilgrim in Psalm 84 leaned so hard toward God's presence that he envied birds. The rich man leaned on his own table until the day he could not, and Paul's readers were being asked to keep leaning on Christ while their neighbors made their lives miserable.

Doctrinally, three matters deserve careful handling. First, Luke 16:19–31 teaches that the dead are conscious, that their condition is fixed at death, and that Scripture is sufficient, and it teaches nothing about purgatory, second chances, or communication with the dead. Second, 2 Thessalonians 2 must be taught without speculation or date-setting; the certainties are apostasy, deception, and the Lord's final victory. Third, God's choosing in 2:13–14 is His eternal purpose to save through the gospel, entered by belief and obedience, and not an unconditional decree about individuals.

The formational thread is that trust and treasure always run together. Where a person puts his money, his calendar, and his fear, that is where his God is. So put this question to the class before they leave: name the one thing you are holding right now that you have never actually spread out before God, and say what it would cost you to open your hands.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Isaiah 33–38 first, and organize the hour around chapters 36 and 37. The narrative carries itself, and the Rabshakeh's speech gives you a living picture of how unbelief argues. Save ten minutes at the end for Hezekiah spreading the letter, and let the class sit with it.

Second session: Take up Luke 16 second. It needs a full hour and a teacher who has decided beforehand exactly how far he will go with the rich man and Lazarus. Spend the first half on the steward and mammon so the second half is not merely about the afterlife.

The other two readings: Psalm 84–85 and 2 Thessalonians 1–3 belong to the extended questions. Warn the class in advance about 2 Thessalonians 2, tell them what Paul does and does not say, and encourage anyone with questions to bring them to you rather than to the internet.

The Letter Spread Before God

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These six chapters are the hinge of the book of Isaiah. Chapters 33 and 34 finish the long cycle of woes and oracles against the nations, chapter 35 lifts the reader with a picture of a redeemed people walking home on a safe road, and then chapters 36 through 39 drop out of poetry into plain narrative. Isaiah has been saying for thirty chapters that Judah should trust God rather than Egypt. Now Assyria arrives at the gate, and we get to see whether anyone believed him.

The confrontation at the wall is one of the great scenes in the Old Testament. The Rabshakeh speaks in Hebrew so the men on the wall will hear, and his argument is theological, not just military: your God cannot save you, no god has saved anyone from us, and in fact your God sent us. He offers food and land and a comfortable exile. He is the serpent in the garden with an army behind him.

Hezekiah's answer is the model. He does not negotiate, he does not answer the taunt, and he does not gather advisers first. He tears his clothes, sends for Isaiah, and then takes the letter into the house of the Lord and spreads it out. His prayer begins with who God is, ends with why God should act for His own name's sake, and in between asks one thing: save us. That night one angel settles the matter. Chapter 38 then shows the same king praying again, this time over his own body, and being given fifteen years he will not use very well.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib occurred in 701 before Christ, during the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign.
- Isaiah 36–39 runs closely parallel to 2 Kings 18:13–20:19 and 2 Chronicles 32, and it serves as the bridge between the first half of Isaiah and the chapters of comfort that begin at chapter 40.
- The Rabshakeh was a high Assyrian official, not a personal name; the title means roughly chief cupbearer or chief officer.
- Isaiah 35 is poetry of restoration. The New Testament applies its language of blind eyes opened and the desert blooming to the work of Christ (Matthew 11:4–5).
- Assyrian records of Sennacherib boast of shutting Hezekiah up in Jerusalem “like a bird in a cage,” and conspicuously never claim to have taken the city.
- Hezekiah's psalm in 38:9–20 is a rare firsthand account of an Old Testament believer's thinking about death, written before the resurrection had been revealed (2 Timothy 1:10).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Isaiah 36:4–20 is a masterclass in intimidation. Which of the Assyrian officer's arguments would be hardest for you to hear shouted from the wall, and how does Hezekiah's prayer in 37:14–20 answer it?*

The Rabshakeh's arguments are worth listing on a board: your allies are useless, your own king has torn down God's altars, your soldiers cannot even ride the horses we would give you, no nation's god has ever stopped us, and your God is the one who sent us here. The last two are the dangerous ones, because they mix a half truth with a lie. Assyria was indeed God's instrument (Isaiah 10:5), but the conclusion drawn from it was false.

Hezekiah's prayer answers the theology rather than the insults. He addresses the Lord of hosts who dwells between the cherubim, who alone is God of all the kingdoms of the earth, who made heaven and earth. Then he grants the enemy's point about the other nations and explains it: those were not gods but wood and stone. His request is not merely rescue but revelation, “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord, You alone.” Ask the class what changes when a prayer starts with who God is instead of with what we need.

Question 2. *Hezekiah took the letter up to the house of the Lord and spread it out before God. What would it look like, concretely, for you to do that with the thing currently keeping you awake at two in the morning?*

Notice what Hezekiah does not do with the letter. He does not read it aloud to the court to build outrage, he does not hide it, and he does not answer it. He carries it to the one place in Jerusalem where God had put His name, and he opens it flat in front of God. There is something bodily and deliberate about it, and that is exactly why it is worth imitating.

Press for specifics. A diagnosis, a letter from an attorney, a child's text message, a number on a bank statement, a name. Encourage the class to make prayer concrete in the same physical way: the paper in hand, the name spoken out loud. Vague prayer produces vague faith. Then note the second half of Hezekiah's pattern: he prayed and then he waited, and he did not go make a treaty while he waited.

Question 3. *Isaiah 33:14 asks who among us can dwell with devouring fire, and verses 15 and 16 give the answer. How does that answer compare with what we usually assume makes a person safe with God?*

Isaiah 33:14 is a sobering question from the mouths of sinners in Zion: who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire, with everlasting burnings? The answer in verses 15 and 16 is not what a modern reader expects. It is not a ritual, a pedigree, or an emotional experience. It is a life: walking righteously, speaking uprightly, despising the gain of oppression, shaking the hands free of bribes, stopping the ears from hearing of bloodshed, shutting the eyes from seeing evil.

Do not let this become salvation by works, and do not let it become a shrug either. The passage describes the character of the person who belongs in God's presence, and the New Testament says the same thing while telling us how such a character is formed (Titus 2:11–14; 1 John 3:7). Ask the class which item on Isaiah's list is most out of fashion, and which one their week most obviously contradicts.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Isaiah 35 describes a road called the Way of Holiness. List everything the chapter says about the road and about who walks on it, then set it beside John 14:6 and Hebrews 10:19–22.*

The road is a highway, it is called the Way of Holiness, the unclean do not pass over it, it is for the redeemed and the ransomed, no lion or ravenous beast is on it, fools shall not err on it, and those who walk it come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy. Jesus says He is the way (John 14:6), and Hebrews 10:19–22 describes a new and living way opened through His flesh, on which cleansed people draw near with full assurance. Isaiah is painting the road home; the New Testament names it.

2. *Compare Isaiah 36–37 with 2 Kings 18–19. Note where the wording matches almost exactly, and consider why God preserved this account in both a historical book and a prophetic one.*

The accounts are nearly identical in wording, including the Rabshakeh's speech, Hezekiah's prayer, and Isaiah's reply. Second Kings tells it as national history and adds the detail of the tribute Hezekiah first paid; Isaiah tells it as the proof of his preaching. The overlap is not a problem but a confirmation: the same event, preserved twice, from two angles, with no attempt to smooth over Hezekiah's earlier attempt to buy Assyria off.

3. *Trace Hezekiah's prayer in 37:14–20. How does he begin, what does he actually ask for, and what reason does he give God for answering him?*

He begins with God's character and uniqueness: the Lord of hosts, God of Israel, who dwells between the cherubim, who alone is God of all the kingdoms of the earth, who made heaven and earth. He asks God to hear and see the words Sennacherib sent to reproach the living God, and then asks plainly to be saved out of his hand. His stated reason is God's glory, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that the Lord alone is God. The request is small and the reason is enormous.

4. *Read Hezekiah's written psalm in Isaiah 38:9–20. What does he say he learned in the sickroom that he had not learned on the throne?*

Hezekiah says he had reckoned till morning that God would break all his bones like a lion, that his life was cut off like a weaver's cloth, and that he went softly all his years in the bitterness of his soul. Then comes the turn: "O Lord, by

these things men live,” and “You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.” He learned in the sickroom that the living, and only the living, praise God, and that his sins, not merely his illness, were the real threat.

5. *Name the specific threat that frightens you most right now. Write it on a card this week, spread it open in prayer the way Hezekiah did, and at the end of the week write down what changed in you.*

Answers will vary. Watch for two failure modes: naming something so general that no prayer can grip it, and naming something and then immediately reaching for a solution that requires compromise. Hezekiah did neither. He named the exact threat and then did nothing but wait on God, and the waiting was the hardest part.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Isaiah 34 and the judgment on Edom uses fierce, hyperbolic poetry. Read it as the language of total, God-ordered judgment in history and do not map it onto current events.
- Isaiah 35 describes redemption in pictures. Do not convert it into an earthly millennial kingdom. The New Testament applies the healing language to Christ’s ministry and the highway to the way opened into God’s presence.
- The shadow going backward on the sundial in 38:7–8 is presented as a genuine sign from God. Teach it as the text gives it and resist speculating about mechanics.
- Hezekiah’s fifteen added years must not be turned into a formula that prayer always lengthens life. God answered a particular man in a particular moment for His own purposes, and the years that followed were not Hezekiah’s best (Isaiah 39).

A Day in Your Courts

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 84 is a pilgrim song, written by someone who cannot get to the temple and cannot stop thinking about it. The images are domestic and tender. Sparrows and swallows have found places to raise their young right there by God's altars, and the psalmist is jealous of birds. His longing is not for architecture but for presence: "My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."

The middle of the psalm blesses those on the road. They pass through the Valley of Baca, a dry place whose name suggests weeping, and they make it a spring; the rain fills the pools. They go from strength to strength until every one of them appears before God in Zion. Note the direction of that verse. Ordinary travel wears a man down. This road builds him up, because of where it ends.

Psalm 85 is a national prayer with a long memory. Verses 1 through 3 recite what God has already done: brought back the captivity, forgiven iniquity, covered sin, turned from wrath. That memory becomes the ground of the request in verses 4 through 7, "Revive us again." Then the psalmist stops asking and starts listening: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." The answer in verses 8 through 13 is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Psalms, mercy and truth meeting each other, righteousness and peace exchanging a kiss, a meeting only completed at the cross.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both psalms are attributed to the sons of Korah, a family of Levitical singers descended from the Korah who rebelled in Numbers 16 and whose children did not die.
- Psalm 84 belongs with the songs of Zion and the pilgrim psalms, sung by Israelites traveling to Jerusalem for the annual feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16).
- Psalm 85 is a communal prayer, most naturally read after a return from captivity, when God had already acted once and the people needed Him to act again.
- "Your anointed" in 84:9 refers to the reigning Davidic king, whose welfare was bound up with the nation's.
- The Valley of Baca is a dry valley on a pilgrim route; the name is associated with weeping or with balsam trees that grow in arid ground.
- Under the new covenant, worship is no longer tied to a place. Jesus says the hour has come when true worshipers worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:21–24).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 84:10 says a day in God's courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. Be honest with each other: what has to be true of a person before that line is a description of him rather than a sentiment he admires?*

The honest answer is that the line requires a person to have actually tasted what the psalmist tasted. He is not comparing a worship service to a vacation; he is comparing the presence of God to everything else on offer. A person who has never been hungry for God will hear the verse as exaggeration, and no amount of scolding will fix that. What changes it is time spent with God in private, which is where appetite is formed.

Ask the class to test the verse against their calendars without shame and without piling on. Where does the assembly rank when it competes with a ball tournament, a shift, a lake house, a long week? Then turn the diagnosis into something usable: what would make Sunday something they arrive at with anticipation? Usually the answer involves what happened Monday through Saturday, not what happens on the platform.

Question 2. *The pilgrims pass through the Valley of Baca and it becomes a spring (84:6). Where have you watched someone's hard stretch of road turn into a place where other people found water?*

The verse says the travelers make the dry valley a place of springs. They do not find water there; they leave it wetter than they found it. That is a striking thing to say about people passing through grief. And the psalm adds that the rain also fills the pools, so both human faithfulness and God's provision are at work in the same valley.

Ask for real names and real stories: the widow whose grief made her the best visitor in the congregation, the couple whose lost child made them the people everyone calls at a hospital, the man whose bankruptcy made him unembarrassed about money and therefore useful. Then ask the harder question. Some of us are in a dry valley now and are leaving it drier than we found it. What would it take to leave a spring instead?

Question 3. *Psalm 85:10 pictures mercy and truth meeting, righteousness and peace kissing. How does a congregation hold mercy and truth together in the same room without quietly surrendering one of them?*

Psalm 85:10 is not sentimentality; it is a problem statement. Mercy and truth pull in opposite directions when someone has actually sinned, and every congregation feels the strain. Truth without mercy produces a cold, accurate church that no one confesses anything to. Mercy without truth produces a warm church that never helps anybody change. The psalm insists both will meet, and the meeting place is the cross, where God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

Bring it to practice. In a congregation, mercy and truth meet when sin is named plainly and the sinner is loved publicly, when restoration is pursued instead of gossip, when discipline is done as Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:15, not counting him an enemy but admonishing him as a brother. Ask the class which of the two their own instincts shortchange, and what one changed habit would balance it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Psalm 84 says about the people who dwell in God's house or travel toward it. Which of those descriptions do you most want to be true of you a year from now?*

The psalm blesses those who dwell in God's house and are still praising Him, those whose strength is in God and whose hearts are set on the highway, those who pass through the dry valley and make it a spring, those who go from strength to strength, and the man who trusts in God. It also says God is a sun and shield, gives grace and glory, and withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly. Answers about which description to aim for will vary; the phrase "from strength to strength" is usually the one that stops people.

2. *This psalm is by the sons of Korah. Read Numbers 16:31–33 and 26:9–11, then read Psalm 84:10 again. What is remarkable about Korah's descendants singing about being doorkeepers?*

Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron over who could come near to God, and the ground opened and swallowed his household. Numbers 26:11 adds a quiet line: the children of Korah did not die. Generations later his descendants are singing that they would rather stand at the doorway of God's house than live in the tents of wickedness. The family that fought over access to God's presence ended up content to be doorkeepers in it. That is what grace does across generations.

3. *Map the movement of Psalm 85: what God has already done (vv. 1–3), what is asked (vv. 4–7), and what the psalmist hears God say (vv. 8–13). Where does the mood turn?*

Verses 1 through 3 recall God's past favor: He brought back the captivity of Jacob, forgave iniquity, covered sin, and turned from His wrath. Verses 4 through 7 ask Him to do it again: restore us, turn away Your anger, revive us, show us Your mercy. The turn comes at verse 8, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." The psalmist stops petitioning and starts listening, and the rest of the psalm is the answer he receives.

4. *Set Psalm 84:11 beside James 1:17 and Romans 8:28. What is being claimed about God's character, and what qualifying phrase in Psalm 84:11 keeps it from becoming a promise of comfort?*

The claim is that God is unchangeably good and generous, a sun and a shield who gives grace and glory and withholds no good thing. James says every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation. The qualifying phrase in Psalm 84:11 is "to those who walk uprightly," and the qualifying word

in Romans 8:28 is “good,” defined in verse 29 as conformity to the image of His Son. God withholds no good thing, but He, not we, defines good, and the promise is not a guarantee of comfort.

5. *Psalm 84:5 blesses the man whose heart is set on the highway to Zion. Name one habit that would let you arrive at Sunday’s assembly prepared rather than merely present, and begin it this week.*

Answers will vary. Good answers usually involve the night before rather than the morning of: reading the text in advance, going to bed at a reasonable hour, praying for the people who will be in the room, arriving early enough to speak to someone who came in alone. Listen for the ones who name a habit and a starting date.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 84 longs for the physical temple, which belonged to the old covenant. Do not transfer that longing to a church building. The New Testament makes the assembly of God’s people, not a structure, the setting of worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21–24; Hebrews 10:24–25).
- Psalm 84:11 is not a prosperity promise. The condition, “those who walk uprightly,” and the definition of what is good both belong to God.
- “Revive us again” in 85:6 is a congregation asking God for renewed favor and life, not a program or an emotional event. Keep the term anchored in the text.

The Steward and the Rich Man

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke 16 is a chapter about money bookended by two parables and hinged on one sentence: “You cannot serve God and mammon.” The first parable is the hardest in the Gospels to teach, because the hero is a crook. A steward about to lose his job uses his last hours of authority to buy goodwill from his master’s debtors. Jesus never calls the man honest. He calls him shrewd, and He points out that the sons of this world are more forward-thinking about their brief future than the sons of light are about eternity.

The application in verses 9 through 13 is the real teaching. Make friends with unrighteous mammon so that when it fails, and it will fail, you are welcomed into everlasting habitations. Money is a small thing and a borrowed thing and someone else’s thing, and how a person handles it reveals what he would do with the true riches. Verse 14 tells us how this landed: the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, derided Him.

Then comes the account of the rich man and Lazarus, which is not merely a story about greed. It is about two men who both die, about a great gulf that cannot be crossed afterward, and about a request for a miraculous warning that is refused. The rich man’s final argument is that his brothers need something more convincing than Scripture. Abraham’s answer closes the chapter and the subject: they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Luke 16 continues the travel section toward Jerusalem; the audience shifts in verse 1 to the disciples and in verse 14 includes the Pharisees who were listening.
- A steward in that world managed his master’s estate with real legal authority, able to make binding contracts, which is why the debtors accepted the reduced bills without question.
- “Mammon” is an Aramaic word for wealth or property. Jesus personifies it as a rival master, not merely as a tool.
- Hades in verse 23 is the realm of the dead between death and the resurrection, not the final hell of Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:14. Keep the terms straight.
- Lazarus is the only named character in any of Jesus’ parabolic teaching, and his name means “God has helped.” This account is not labeled a parable in the text.
- Verses 16 through 18 place John the Baptist as the boundary of the age of the Law and the Prophets, with the kingdom now being preached (compare Colossians 2:14).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The master commends the unjust steward for acting shrewdly, not for stealing. What exactly is Jesus asking His disciples to imitate in 16:8–9, and what is He plainly not asking them to imitate?*

Jesus commends one quality, foresight. The steward understood that his present position was temporary, he knew exactly when it would end, and he used what he still controlled to prepare for what came next. That is all. The dishonesty is named twice in the text, “unjust steward” and “unrighteous mammon,” so no one has to defend it.

The application Jesus draws is startling in its practicality: use money, which is going to fail, to make friends who will welcome you into everlasting dwellings. In other words, convert a temporary asset into an eternal one by using it for people. Ask the class to be concrete: what would it look like to spend money this year in a way that will matter in a hundred years? Benevolence, evangelism, hospitality, and supporting a preacher are not sentimental answers; they are exactly what Jesus is describing.

Question 2. *Jesus says no servant can serve two masters (16:13). He does not say should not; He says cannot. Where does that tug of war actually show up in an ordinary week for people like us?*

The word Jesus uses is impossibility, not preference. The reason is in the same verse: a servant will either hate one and love the other, or hold to one and despise the other. Money does not want to be a tool. It wants to be a master, and it gives orders about where you live, how much you work, whom you marry, when you can be generous, and what you are afraid of.

The tug of war is usually quiet. It shows up in the job taken for money that costs the family its evenings, in the giving decided by what is left over, in the anxiety that follows the market, in the reluctance to be generous because the number in the account has become a measure of safety. Ask the class a diagnostic question: what decision have you made in the last year that money decided for you? Then ask what God would have decided.

Question 3. *In 16:27–31 Abraham says that people who will not hear Moses and the prophets will not be persuaded even by a resurrection. Why would that be true, and what does it settle about how much we should expect a dramatic sign or experience to accomplish?*

The reason is that the problem is not evidence but will. The rich man's brothers had Moses and the prophets, which told them plainly to care for the poor and to fear God, and they were not doing it. A ghost at the dinner table would have frightened them, but fright is not repentance. Jesus knew what He was saying: within a short time a man named Lazarus would be raised from the dead in Bethany, and the response of the chief priests was to plot his death too (John 12:10–11).

This is the place to settle what Scripture is for. If God has spoken, and He has, then no experience is needed to supplement it, and no experience will substitute for it. The word is what produces faith (Romans 10:17), and Scripture furnishes the man of God completely (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Handle this graciously with people who long for a sign, and point them to the sufficiency of what they already hold in their hands.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything the account in 16:19–31 actually says about the condition of the dead. Then, on a separate line, list the questions it does not answer. Hold the line between the two strictly.*

The text says both men died, that the beggar was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, that the rich man was buried and in Hades was in torment, that he was conscious and could see, speak, remember his life and his brothers, and feel; that Lazarus was comforted; that a great gulf is fixed so that no one crosses over; and that the dead cannot return to warn the living. What it does not tell us is the geography of the unseen world, the mechanics of a bodiless person feeling thirst, the location of these places, or whether the two men could ordinarily see each other. Teach what is stated and stop there.

2. *Compare Luke 16:18 with Matthew 19:3–9. What does Jesus name as the single exception, and why might He raise the subject of marriage in the middle of a chapter about money?*

Jesus names sexual immorality, that is fornication, as the single exception under which a man may put away his wife and marry another (Matthew 19:9). He raises marriage here because the Pharisees had just sneered at His teaching on money, and both subjects expose the same thing: men who justify themselves before other men while God knows their hearts (16:15). Covetousness and loose divorce were both respectable sins among them.

3. *Read 1 Timothy 6:17–19 beside Luke 16:9. How does Paul tell the rich to use what they have, and what does he say such use lays up for them?*

Paul tells the rich not to be haughty or to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, and thereby to store up a good foundation for the time to come so that they may lay hold on eternal life. That is Luke 16:9 in plain instruction: money spent on people for God's sake is money moved ahead of you.

4. Trace the argument of 16:10–12. Identify what Jesus calls “that which is least,” what He calls “true riches,” and what belongs to “another man.”

“That which is least” is money and material things, small by comparison with what God is really entrusting to us.

“True riches” is what money only imitates: the gospel, souls, spiritual responsibility in the kingdom. “Another man’s” is wealth itself, which is God’s and is only lent to us for a while. The logic is that faithfulness is a settled character, not a function of the size of the trust, and God does not hand true riches to a man who cannot be trusted with a checkbook.

5. Lazarus lay at the gate, and the rich man walked past him every day without ever being cruel to him. Who is at your gate? Name him, and do one specific thing for him before this week ends.

Answers will vary. Press past the general category of the poor to a person whose name and address the class member knows. The rich man’s condemnation was not cruelty; it was that Lazarus became part of the scenery. Ask each member to notice this week whom he steps past out of habit.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The rich man and Lazarus: teach it as a real account, told by the Lord, about the conscious state of the dead before the judgment and about the sufficiency of Scripture. Do not construct an elaborate map of the unseen world from it, and do not let the class spend the hour on questions the text does not answer.
- It does not teach that poverty saves or that wealth damns. Abraham was wealthy and is holding Lazarus. The rich man’s sin was a life lived entirely for himself with a beggar at his gate.
- There is no second chance and no purgatory here. The gulf is fixed, and the appeal for a warning is refused. Neither is there any hint of prayer to or through the dead.
- Verse 18 on divorce will raise questions. Answer plainly from Matthew 19:9 and let people know you will study it with them privately at length, so that one verse does not consume the hour.

Stand Fast and Hold On

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This second letter follows the first by only a few months, and it exists because two things had happened. The persecution had intensified, and someone had circulated a message, possibly forged in Paul's name, claiming that the day of the Lord had already come. Chapter 1 answers the first problem with the certainty of judgment, and chapter 2 answers the second with a correction.

Chapter 1 is unusually direct about the return of Christ as a day of reckoning. The Lord will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel. The penalty is named plainly, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. But notice the pastoral purpose: Paul says this to comfort people being hurt, assuring them that God sees, that nothing is unnoticed, and that the same day will be glorious for those who believed.

Chapter 2 requires restraint from the teacher. Paul tells them that day will not come until the falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed, and then he says something no modern reader can fully recover: "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?" They knew what was restraining. We do not, with certainty. What the chapter does say plainly is enough: apostasy would come, it would be marked by lying wonders and by the deceit of unrighteousness, it would prosper among those who did not receive the love of the truth, and the Lord will destroy it with the breath of His mouth. Chapter 3 then brings everything down to earth, to work, bread, and how a congregation handles a disorderly member.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy wrote from Corinth about A.D. 51 or 52, shortly after 1 Thessalonians.
- The congregation was suffering active persecution (1:4), which explains the letter's emphasis on endurance and on the certainty of divine justice.
- A false report was circulating, whether by spirit, word, or letter "as if from us" (2:2), claiming the day of the Lord had already come. Paul ends the letter with a note in his own hand as a safeguard (3:17).
- The "falling away" of 2:3 is the apostasy the New Testament repeatedly warns about (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1-3).
- "Traditions" in 2:15 means apostolic teaching delivered by word or by letter, before the New Testament was complete; it is not human custom.
- The instructions in 3:6-15 are the earliest detailed description of congregational discipline in Paul's letters, paired with 1 Corinthians 5 and Romans 16:17.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul tells persecuted Christians that their endurance is evidence of God's righteous judgment (1:4-7). How does that reframe what they were suffering, and what comfort does it carefully not offer them?*

Paul's argument in 1:5 is that their patient endurance is "manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God." The suffering itself is not the evidence; the way they are bearing it is. Faith that grows under pressure shows that God is at work, and it also shows that a moral accounting must exist, because a just God will not leave the account open forever. Verses 6 and 7 state both sides: tribulation to those who trouble you, and rest to you who are troubled.

Be careful about what this does not offer. It does not promise rescue now. It does not promise the persecutors will stop. It does not say the suffering is small or that it has a hidden benefit they will enjoy shortly. It says God sees, God is just, and the account will be settled on a specific day. That is thinner comfort than we usually want and

stronger comfort than we usually have. Ask the class what they would say to a Christian in a country where this letter is still current events.

Question 2. *Second Thessalonians 2 has fueled centuries of speculation. Paul reminds the readers that he told them these things in person and that they already knew what restrained the man of sin. What can we say responsibly from this text, and what should we refuse to say?*

Responsibly, we can say this much from the text: a great apostasy would come; a man of sin, the son of perdition, would be revealed; he would oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, taking his seat in the temple of God and showing himself as God; something was restraining him in Paul's day; the mystery of lawlessness was already working; his coming would be with power, signs, and lying wonders; those who perish do so because they did not receive the love of the truth; and the Lord will consume him with the breath of His mouth and destroy him at His coming.

We should refuse to name a date, to name a living individual, or to build a timeline. Paul's own readers knew what he meant because he had taught them face to face, and that conversation was not written down. Historically, many careful students have understood the passage of the great falling away that produced a corrupted hierarchy claiming divine prerogatives, and that reading fits the language well. Hold such an application humbly, state plainly what the text guarantees, and refuse to let the class turn the hour into speculation. The pastoral point is verse 15: stand fast.

Question 3. *Paul devotes the end of the letter to members who would not work and had become busybodies (3:6–15). Why does he treat idleness as a matter for congregational action, and how does verse 15 govern the way it must be done?*

Idleness was not a private failing in that congregation. Some had stopped working, were living off the labor of others, and were going house to house as busybodies. Paul had already commanded them otherwise while he was with them, and he had modeled it himself, working night and day so as not to be a burden. When a member refuses apostolic teaching and the whole body pays for it, it becomes the church's business.

Verse 15 is the governing line: "Do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Withdrawal is not shunning as punishment; it is the removal of ordinary fellowship so that the person feels the abnormality of his situation and is ashamed, with restoration as the goal. Ask the class what makes this so rarely practiced now, and whether the true reason is compassion or conflict avoidance.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List what 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 says about the Lord's return: who comes with Him, in what manner, for whose benefit, and on what basis the judgment falls.*

The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The penalty is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. On the same day He comes to be glorified in His saints and admired among all who believe. Note that the basis of judgment includes both not knowing God and not obeying the gospel, which rules out any version of faith that never obeys (Hebrews 5:9).

2. *Second Thessalonians 2:13–14 says God chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, and adds that He called you by our gospel. Read 2:10 and Romans 10:17, then explain how a person comes to be among the chosen.*

The verse itself names the means: sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth, and God calls people by the gospel. Second Thessalonians 2:10 says the perishing perish because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved, and Romans 10:17 says faith comes by hearing the word of God. So God's choice is not an unconditional decree over individuals. He has chosen to save a people through the gospel, and a person enters that chosen people by hearing, believing, and obeying the call (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26–27).

3. Trace everything chapter 2 says about the man of sin: what he does, where he sits, what is restraining him, how he works, and what finally happens to him.

He is called the man of sin and the son of perdition. He opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or is worshiped. He sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Something and someone restrains him until the restraint is removed. His coming is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with unrighteous deception among those who perish. God sends them strong delusion, that is, He gives them over to the lie they preferred. Finally the Lord consumes him with the breath of His mouth and destroys him with the brightness of His coming.

4. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:15 with 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 2 Timothy 2:2. What kind of tradition is Paul telling them to hold, and how is it different from the traditions Jesus condemned in Mark 7:6-9?

Paul means the apostolic teaching itself, delivered orally and in writing while revelation was still being given. First Corinthians 11:2 praises them for keeping the traditions as he delivered them, and 2 Timothy 2:2 tells Timothy to commit what he heard to faithful men who could teach others. That is inspired instruction passed on intact. The traditions Jesus condemned in Mark 7 were human rules that had displaced God's commandments. The difference is the source: God's word binds, man's additions do not.

5. Paul says not to grow weary in doing good (3:13). Name the good work you are closest to quitting, and decide right now what would keep you at it for one more month.

Answers will vary. Expect answers like teaching a class nobody seems to appreciate, visiting a member who never responds, praying for a child who is not coming back, or serving a congregation that has taken it for granted. The useful follow-up is not encouragement but specificity: what is the next single act, and on what day will it happen?

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Refuse date-setting and identification games with the man of sin. Say clearly what the text says, offer historical application humbly if at all, and do not let speculation run the class.
- "God chose you from the beginning" must be taught as God's eternal purpose to save a people in Christ through the gospel, entered by belief and obedience, not as unconditional individual election (Ephesians 1:4-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:14).
- "God will send them strong delusion" is God giving people over to what they already loved, after they refused the love of the truth (2:10-12). It is not God causing men to sin.
- Congregational discipline in 3:6-15 is to be taught as Scripture frames it, with restoration as the goal and the withdrawn member still regarded as a brother. Handle it gently in a class that has seen it done badly.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Isaiah 39-43 · Psalm 86-88 · Luke 17 · 1 Timothy 1-2

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