

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 74 OF 104

Preach the Word

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Jeremiah 1-5
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 95-97
Gospels	Luke 20:9-47
General New Testament	2 Timothy 3-4

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to bring the class face to face with a God who keeps speaking and with the human habit of not listening. Jeremiah is handed a message and told that people will fight him for it. Psalm 95 says today, while it is still called today. Jesus tells a story about landowners' servants beaten one after another and then a son murdered. Paul, with the sword already sharpened, tells Timothy to preach the word anyway. By Sunday evening the class should feel the weight of having heard.

Doctrinally, four points need care. Jeremiah 1:5 concerns God's foreknowledge and His appointment of a man to a task, not unconditional election of individuals to salvation. Psalm 95, read with Hebrews 3 and 4, teaches that people once redeemed can be shut out of the rest, which settles once saved, always saved from the Old Testament side. Luke 20 places the vineyard in the hands of a fruit bearing people now, not in a future earthly kingdom, and proves the resurrection from the wording of a single verse. And 2 Timothy 3:16-17 establishes that the Scriptures are sufficient, complete, and enough, which is the foundation under everything else your congregation practices.

The formational thread is what a person does with a word he has already received. Judah had prophets. The wilderness generation had the sea and the manna. The vinedressers had servant after servant. Timothy had a grandmother, a mother, and Paul. Every one of them had already heard. So put this to your class before they leave: name one thing God has said to you plainly in the last year that you have not yet obeyed, and name the day this week you will start.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Luke 20:9-47 first. It carries the week's theme in story form, and the parable of the vinedressers connects directly to Jeremiah without you having to build a bridge. Give twenty minutes to the parable, fifteen to the resurrection argument, and close with the coin and the image of God.

Second session: Take up Jeremiah 1-5 second, and spend the first ten minutes settling Jeremiah 1:5 so that nobody leaves confused about election. Then build the rest of the hour on the two evils of 2:13 and the fountain and cisterns, which is the most teachable image in the entire prophets.

The other two readings: Psalm 95-97 and 2 Timothy 3-4 carry the extended questions. Read Psalm 95 aloud at the close of one session and let the turn at verse 7b land without commentary. Ask every member to read 2 Timothy 4:6-8 slowly at home and write one sentence about how he wants his own last paragraph to read.

A Prophet to the Nations

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Jeremiah's call is the most personal call narrative in the prophets. God does not begin with a throne room or a burning bush but with a sentence about Jeremiah himself: I knew you, I set you apart, I appointed you. Then comes the young man's objection, which is not false modesty. He is probably in his late teens, from a priestly family sidelined since Solomon, and he is being sent to confront kings. God's answer is not that Jeremiah is capable. God's answer is that He will be with him.

The two visions in chapter 1 set the shape of the book. The almond branch, the first tree to wake in the spring, is a play on words: God is watching over His word to perform it. The boiling pot tilted from the north announces the invader. Everything Jeremiah says for forty years unfolds between those two images, a word that will surely come true and an army that will surely arrive.

Chapters 2 through 5 are the indictment. God does not open with threats; He opens with memory, recalling a bride who followed Him into a wilderness. Then He asks the question that runs through the whole book: what did your fathers find wrong with Me that they went so far from Me? Sin here is not primarily rule breaking. It is leaving a spring of living water to chisel a cracked tank out of rock.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Jeremiah was a priest, the son of Hilkiah, from Anathoth in Benjamin, a village about three miles northeast of Jerusalem (1:1).
- His call came in the thirteenth year of Josiah, roughly 627 B.C., and his ministry ran about forty years through Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
- The book is not arranged chronologically. Oracles, sermons, and narratives are grouped by theme, so a class that expects a timeline will be confused. Say so at the start.
- The foe from the north is Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Assyria had fallen, Egypt was reaching north, and Judah kept betting on the wrong empire.
- Josiah's reforms were real but shallow in the nation at large (2 Chronicles 34). Jeremiah preaches to people whose religion had been officially corrected without their hearts being changed.
- The genre is mixed: poetry for the oracles, prose for the sermons and narrative. Read the poetry as poetry, with its heaped-up images.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jeremiah 1:5 says God knew him, sanctified him, and ordained him a prophet before he was born. Discuss carefully what God is claiming there, and how you would answer a friend who quoted it to prove that God decides before birth who will be saved and who will be lost.*

Take the verse apart phrase by phrase. God's foreknowledge is plain: He knew Jeremiah before He formed him, as He knows every person He forms. The sanctifying and ordaining are just as plain, but notice what Jeremiah is appointed to. He is appointed a prophet to the nations. The verse says nothing at all about Jeremiah's eternal destiny. It says God had a task ready before there was a man to do it, which is exactly what Paul says of his own apostleship in Galatians 1:15–16.

Then draw the line clearly. Scripture never teaches that God decrees individuals to salvation or condemnation apart from their own response. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), wants all men saved and coming to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), and holds each person accountable for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:20). Jeremiah himself could have refused; God has to tell him not to be dismayed, which would be a strange

thing to say to a man whose obedience was already fixed. Be gracious here. Many sincere people have been taught this verse wrongly, and a calm walk through it does more good than an argument.

Question 2. *Jeremiah 2:13 names two evils: they forsook the fountain of living waters, and they hewed out cisterns that hold no water. Talk about what makes a leaky cistern attractive enough that a person would leave a spring for it.*

A cistern was a pear shaped pit chiseled into limestone and plastered to hold runoff. Every household in Judah understood the difference between a cistern and a spring. A spring gives water you did not work for and cannot exhaust. A cistern gives water you hauled, stored, and rationed, and if the plaster cracks you wake up to mud. The genius of the metaphor is that Judah had not become atheists. They had become do it yourselves.

So ask what makes the cistern attractive. It is nearby. It is yours. You control it. Nobody has to know what you put in it. Then get specific with the class: the career that quietly became the source of a man's worth, the phone that fills every silence, the relationship asked to carry weight no human can carry, the ledger of good deeds that props up a person's sense of being acceptable. Every one of them holds water for a while.

Question 3. *God tells Jeremiah in 1:8 and 1:17 not to be afraid of their faces. Where does fear of somebody's face still silence Christians who know exactly what ought to be said?*

Jeremiah is told twice not to fear faces, and the repetition tells you the danger was real. He would preach to relatives who plotted against him (11:21), to a king who cut up his scroll (36:23), and to officials who dropped him into a cistern of mud (38:6). God does not promise him a friendly audience. He promises to make him a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, and then says something honest: they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail.

Bring it into the room. Fear of faces is rarely fear of persecution in our setting; it is fear of the raised eyebrow, the cooled friendship, the reputation for being narrow. Ask each person to picture one specific face, at work, in the family, in the neighborhood, that has kept him quiet. Then ask what one sentence he would say if that face did not frighten him, and whether he will say it this week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything God promises to do for Jeremiah in 1:7–10 and 1:17–19. How many of those promises are about protection, and how many are about the message itself?*

God promises to send him and to put words in his mouth, to deliver him, to set him over nations and kingdoms to root out and to build, to gird him and make him a fortified city with iron pillars and bronze walls, and to be with him so that his enemies do not prevail. Most of the promises are about God's presence and God's words, not about a comfortable life. Jeremiah is promised survival, not success as people measure it.

2. *Read Jeremiah 2:1–3, where God remembers the kindness of Israel's youth and her love as a bride. Compare that with what the Lord says to Ephesus in Revelation 2:4. What has been lost in both cases?*

God remembers a bride who followed Him into an unsown wilderness, when Israel was holiness to the Lord and the firstfruits of His increase. Revelation 2:4 charges Ephesus with leaving its first love. In both cases the problem is not that the relationship broke down in a moment but that early devotion cooled into routine while the outward forms continued. God notices the difference, and He remembers what things used to be like.

3. *Trace the pictures God uses for Judah in chapters 2 and 3: a spring abandoned, a wild donkey, a faithless wife, a treacherous sister. Which one lands hardest on you, and why?*

Answers will vary. The images build: an abandoned spring and cracked cisterns (2:13), a broken yoke and a bowing harlot (2:20), a wild donkey sniffing the wind in her season (2:24), a thief ashamed when caught (2:26), a wife divorced for adultery (3:1–8), and Judah as the treacherous sister who watched Israel's judgment and learned nothing (3:7–11). Listen for honesty rather than for a right answer, and note that the last image is the most sobering: watching someone else suffer for a sin and going ahead with it anyway.

4. *Jeremiah 5:1 tells the prophet to run through Jerusalem and see whether he can find one man who does justly and seeks truth. Read Genesis 18:22–33 alongside it. What do the two passages together say about how much God values a single righteous person?*

In Genesis 18 Abraham bargains God down to ten righteous men in Sodom, and God agrees each time. In Jeremiah 5:1 God offers to pardon a whole city for one. God is never eager to judge; He is looking for a reason not to. That is why the silence of Jeremiah 5:1 is so heavy. It also raises the value of the faithful person who thinks he is accomplishing nothing where he is.

5. *Name one broken cistern you are still digging: a place where you go for what only God actually gives. What is one concrete thing you will do this week to go back to the fountain instead?*

Answers will vary. Press for one cistern named out loud or in writing and one specific replacement action: an hour moved, an app removed, a conversation begun, a Bible open before the phone. General resolutions to trust God more will not survive Tuesday.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jeremiah 1:5 is about foreknowledge and appointment to a task, not unconditional individual election to salvation. Handle it plainly and kindly, and pair it with Galatians 1:15, 2 Peter 3:9, and Ezekiel 18:20.
- The book is topical rather than chronological. Tell the class up front so that no one is derailed trying to build a timeline out of chapters 1 through 5.
- The marriage and divorce imagery of chapter 3 describes God's covenant with a nation, not a rule for Christian marriage. Do not build a doctrine of divorce and remarriage from it; go to Matthew 19 for that.
- Jeremiah 4:23–26 pictures the land ruined by invasion using the language of Genesis 1:2. It is poetic reversal of creation, not evidence for a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

Today If You Hear

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 95 is built on a hinge. The first half is warm and physical: sing, shout, come before His presence, kneel, we are the sheep of His hand. Then verse 7b interrupts with the word today, and the rest of the psalm is God speaking in the first person about a generation that heard His voice and hardened anyway. Worship and obedience are not two subjects here. They are one subject, and the psalm refuses to let a congregation separate them.

Psalm 96 takes the same God and turns the congregation outward. A new song is sung, but it is sung to the nations: declare His glory among the heathen, say among the nations that the Lord reigns. Idols are nothing; the Lord made the heavens. The psalm ends with the fields rejoicing and the trees of the wood singing because He comes to judge the earth. Judgment, in this psalm, is good news, because a world under a righteous Judge is a world finally set right.

Psalm 97 supplies the scene: clouds and darkness, fire going before Him, mountains melting like wax. Then it narrows to a single quiet promise in verse 11, light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart. Big God, small seed, and a harvest for people who keep loving Him when it costs.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 93 through 100 are commonly grouped as enthronement psalms, built around the declaration that the Lord reigns. Psalm 95 stands at their center with its warning.
- Meribah and Massah refer to Exodus 17:1–7, the water from the rock, and the name is tied in Numbers 14 and 20 to the generation that refused to enter Canaan.
- Hebrews 3:7–4:11 quotes Psalm 95 at length, treats its today as speaking to Christians, and builds the whole warning of Hebrews 3 and 4 on it.
- Psalm 96 appears nearly word for word in 1 Chronicles 16:23–33, sung when David brought the ark to Jerusalem.
- These are congregational psalms meant to be sung together, not private meditations. Their natural setting is a gathered people, which is why they fit a Sunday assembly so well.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 95 moves from singing to kneeling to a hard warning in fifteen verses. Why would a call to worship end with the failure of the wilderness generation, and how should that shape the way we enter the assembly on Sunday?*

The turn in verse 7b is deliberate and it is the point of the psalm. Israel sang these words in the very place where their fathers' bodies were a warning. The logic is simple: the people most in danger of hardening are the people already in the building. Meribah was not committed by pagans. It was committed by the redeemed, within weeks of the Red Sea, over drinking water.

Apply it to a Sunday. A congregation can sing with genuine feeling and still go home unchanged, and the psalm says the difference is whether the voice heard was obeyed today. Ask the class what they do in the ten minutes before the assembly begins, and what they do in the two hours after it ends, because the psalm connects the singing to the obeying and dares us to keep them together.

Question 2. *Hebrews 3:7–4:11 quotes Psalm 95 and applies it directly to Christians. Read both passages side by side and discuss what the writer of Hebrews means by the rest that still remains.*

Hebrews takes three things from Psalm 95. First, the word today, which the writer says still stands open (3:13, 15; 4:7). Second, the danger, an evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God, which is why 3:12–14 says we are

made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm to the end. Third, the rest, which Hebrews argues cannot be merely Canaan, since Joshua gave them that land and God still spoke of a rest long afterward through David (4:8).

The rest that remains is the eternal rest of God's people, entered by a faith that keeps believing and keeps obeying. Two errors to head off: do not turn Hebrews 4:9 into an argument for Sabbath keeping, since the writer's point is that the rest is future and spiritual and not a day on a calendar; and do not soften Hebrews 3:12–14 into a promise that nobody can fall. The whole passage is written to Christians who were in real danger of drifting back.

Question 3. *Psalm 96 tells the singer to declare God's glory among the nations and His wonders among all people. Name the specific places in your ordinary week where that declaring would actually have to happen.*

Psalm 96 will not let worship stay indoors. The new song is immediately aimed outward, and the reason given is theological: all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. If that is true, then the neighbors are not merely holding a different opinion; they are trusting something that does not exist.

Push past the abstraction. Declaring God's glory among the nations happens at a lunch table, in a break room, across a fence, at a ball field, in a text message to a cousin. Ask each person to name the place and the person. Then ask what one sentence he could say there this week that a person who believed Psalm 96 would say. Most of us do not lack courage so much as we lack a first sentence.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Mark where Psalm 95 turns. List everything in verses 1 through 7a that worshipers are invited to do, and everything in 7b through 11 they are warned not to do.*

Verses 1 through 7a invite the worshiper to sing to the Lord, make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation, come before His presence with thanksgiving, make a joyful noise with psalms, worship, bow down, and kneel before our Maker, because He is a great God and King above all gods and we are the people of His pasture. Verses 7b through 11 warn against hardening the heart, tempting and proving God, erring in heart, and not knowing His ways, which shut a generation out of His rest.

2. *Read Exodus 17:1–7 and Numbers 14:20–23, the two events behind Meribah and Massah. What exactly did that generation refuse to believe about God?*

At Meribah and Massah the people quarreled over water and asked whether the Lord was among them or not, after the plagues and the sea and the manna. In Numbers 14 they refused to enter the land because of the giants, though God had promised it. In both cases they refused to believe that God's proven character applied to their present trouble. That is the exact sin the psalm warns worshipers about, and it is the sin nearest to any long time church member.

3. *Count the commands in Psalm 96:1–10. Which of them are aimed at the congregation, and which are aimed at the whole earth?*

Sing to the Lord, sing, sing, bless His name, show forth His salvation, declare His glory among the heathen, declare His wonders among all people, give to the Lord glory and strength, give the glory due His name, bring an offering, come into His courts, worship, fear before Him, and say among the nations that the Lord reigns. Roughly half are addressed to the worshiping congregation and half send that congregation out to all the earth and all families of people. The psalm assumes no wall between the two.

4. *Psalm 97:7 says worship Him, all you gods. Compare Hebrews 1:6, where the same kind of language is applied to the Son. What is the writer of Hebrews arguing about Jesus?*

Hebrews 1:6 applies the line to the Son at His coming into the world, using it to prove that Jesus is not an angel but the object of angelic worship. The argument of Hebrews 1 is the full deity of Christ: He is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His person, addressed as God in 1:8, and worshiped by the heavenly host. Psalm 97 is one of the writer's exhibits.

5. Psalm 97:10 says you who love the Lord, hate evil. Name one thing you have been tolerating that a person who loved God would refuse to keep in the house. What will you do about it before Sunday?

Answers will vary. Look for something specific and losable: a subscription, a program, a running joke, a pattern of talk about a coworker, a habit of consuming outrage. Love for God and affection for evil cannot occupy the same heart indefinitely; one of them starts pushing the other out. Ask for a date, not an intention.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not let Hebrews 4:9 become a Sabbath argument. The rest that remains is the rest of God's people at the end, not a command to keep a day. The Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath.
- Psalm 95:11 and Hebrews 3:12-14 together teach plainly that people who were once God's redeemed people can be shut out. Teach that without harshness, and without hinting that a Christian can never know where he stands.
- The instruments named in some psalms belonged to the Old Covenant worship of Israel at the temple. The New Testament directs Christians to sing and make melody in the heart (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Make the point briefly and kindly if it comes up, then return to the psalm.
- Psalm 97:7 uses the word gods of idols and heavenly beings. It does not concede that other gods exist; verse 7 itself calls those who serve them ashamed.

The Son They Killed

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The parable of the vinedressers is Isaiah 5 retold with the ending changed. Everyone listening knew that the vineyard was Israel. What they did not expect was the role assigned to them. Jesus is not telling a story about ancient history; He is telling the chief priests what they will do on Friday, in front of witnesses, and they know it. Luke says so in verse 19: they sought to lay hands on Him that very hour.

What follows is a sequence of trap questions. The spies come about tribute, hoping to get Him executed by Rome or discredited with the crowd. The Sadducees come with a manufactured story about seven brothers, hoping to make the resurrection look ridiculous. Jesus answers each question at a level none of them anticipated, and Luke notes that after a while no one dared ask Him anything.

Then He goes on the offensive. From Psalm 110 He asks how the Messiah can be both David's son and David's Lord, a question His enemies cannot answer without conceding who He is. He ends by warning the people about religious men who dress for admiration and pray for effect while foreclosing on widows. The contrast with the widow of the next chapter is deliberate.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is Tuesday of the final week, in the temple courts, with Passover crowds filling Jerusalem and the authorities looking for a way to arrest Him without a riot.
- The vineyard image comes straight from Isaiah 5:1–7, where the vineyard is the house of Israel and the wild grapes are injustice and oppression.
- Absentee landlords with leased estates were common in first century Galilee, so the parable's legal setup would have sounded like a current events story to the hearers.
- The Sadducees were the priestly aristocracy, accepted only the five books of Moses as authoritative in practice, and denied resurrection, angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8). Jesus answers them from Exodus for that reason.
- Psalm 110 is the Old Testament passage the New Testament quotes most often, always of Christ enthroned at God's right hand (Acts 2:34–36; Hebrews 1:13; 10:12–13).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In the parable of the vinedressers the owner keeps sending servants long after any reasonable man would have sent soldiers. What is Jesus saying about God's patience, and what does it mean when He says the vineyard will be given to others?*

Count the sendings. Servant after servant, beaten, shamed, wounded, cast out, and still the owner sends. The parable is a compressed history of the prophets, and the restraint is the point. Jeremiah, whom your class is also reading this week, is one of those servants. God's patience here is not weakness; it is the same longsuffering Peter says is salvation (2 Peter 3:9, 15). But the parable also insists that patience has an end, and that the end comes after the son has been rejected.

On the vineyard being given to others: this is the transfer of covenant privilege from a nation that rejected its Messiah to the people of God made of Jew and Gentile alike, the church (Matthew 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9–10; Romans 11:17–24). Be careful in two directions. It is not a licence for contempt toward Jewish people; the first church was entirely Jewish, and Paul says God has not cast away His people, since a remnant believed. And it is not a delay of the kingdom to some future earthly arrangement. The vineyard was handed over within that generation and stands open to anyone who will bear fruit.

Question 2. *Jesus answers the question about tribute by asking whose image is on the coin (20:24–25). If the coin belongs to Caesar because it bears his image, work out carefully what belongs to God and why.*

The coin bore Caesar's image and inscription, so Caesar had a claim on it. Then Jesus adds the second half, render to God the things that are God's, and lets the listener finish the sentence. What bears God's image? Genesis 1:27 answers: the man holding the coin. Caesar can claim taxes. God claims the taxpayer.

Work it out with the class so it does not stay clever. If you belong to God entirely, then your calendar, your body, your money beyond the tax, your speech and your ambitions are not divided between two owners. Christians owe the government real obedience and honest taxes (Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17), and they owe God everything, including the obedience they give the government. Ask where someone is currently rendering to himself what belongs to God.

Question 3. *The Sadducees denied the resurrection, and Jesus answered them from a single phrase in Exodus about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Discuss how He argues, and what His method says about how carefully we ought to read Scripture.*

Jesus answers the Sadducees on two fronts. First, their question assumes that the next life is a continuation of this one; He says those counted worthy of that age neither marry nor are given in marriage, and cannot die anymore. Second, He proves the resurrection from Exodus 3:6, the one part of Scripture the Sadducees would not dispute, and He hangs the argument on the present tense: God says I am the God of Abraham, long after Abraham died. He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Draw out the method. Jesus reasons from the exact wording of a verse and expects the text to bear that weight, which tells you what He believed about inspiration. He also meets people on the ground they accept. Both are worth imitating. On the marriage question, say only what the text says: relationships in the resurrection are not ended but transformed, and the arrangement of marriage as we know it, with its purposes of companionship in this life and the raising of children, belongs to this age. Do not speculate beyond that, and be tender; someone in the room has buried a husband or wife.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the sending in 20:10–13. How many servants are sent, what happens to each, and what does the owner say to himself before he sends his son?*

Three servants are sent in Luke's account. The first is beaten and sent away empty, the second is beaten and shamed and sent away empty, the third is wounded and cast out. Then the owner says, what shall I do? I will send my beloved son; it may be they will respect him when they see him. The word beloved is the same word spoken from heaven at the baptism and the transfiguration, so Luke's reader knows exactly who the son is.

2. *Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22–23 about the rejected stone. Read that psalm, then read Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:4–8. How do the apostles use the same verse?*

Psalm 118:22 says the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. Peter quotes it before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:11 and says plainly, this is the stone set at nought by you builders. In 1 Peter 2:4–8 he combines it with Isaiah 28:16 and Isaiah 8:14 to say that Christ is precious to believers and a stone of stumbling to the disobedient. The rejected stone is not merely restored; He becomes the one everything else is measured by.

3. *Acts 23:8 tells you what the Sadducees denied. List those denials, and explain why the question in Luke 20:28–33 was designed as a trap rather than as an honest inquiry.*

Acts 23:8 says the Sadducees deny the resurrection, angels, and spirits. Their story of seven brothers and one wife is built on the levirate law of Deuteronomy 25:5–10 and is designed to make the resurrection collapse into absurdity. It is not an honest question; it is a constructed case, and Jesus answers it by rejecting its premise rather than solving its arithmetic.

4. Read Psalm 110:1, which Jesus quotes in 20:42–43. If David calls the Messiah his Lord, what is Jesus claiming about Himself, and how does Peter use the same psalm in Acts 2:34–36?

Psalm 110:1 records the Lord saying to David's Lord, sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool. If David, the greatest king in Israel's memory, calls this figure his Lord, then Messiah is more than David's descendant. Peter uses the same verse in Acts 2:34–36 to prove that Jesus, raised and ascended, has been made both Lord and Christ, and is reigning now.

5. Luke 20:46–47 describes men who loved long robes, greetings in the markets, the best seats, and long prayers, and who devoured widows' houses. Name one place where you have let appearance stand in for substance, and one specific step you will take this week to close the gap.

Answers will vary. Listen for honest specifics: a reputation for generosity larger than the actual giving, a prayer voice different from the private one, service done where it will be seen and skipped where it will not. The step should be small, concrete, and hidden, since hiddenness is the cure for the disease Jesus names.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The vineyard given to others is the church, Jew and Gentile together, not a postponed earthly kingdom. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:34–36; Colossians 1:13). Do not let the parable be read through a dispensational grid.
- Guard the tone when teaching the rejection of Christ by the Jewish leadership. The apostles, the first church, and Jesus Himself were Jewish. This is a warning about privilege presumed upon, and it applies to us.
- On Luke 20:34–36, say what the text says and stop. Marriage as an institution belongs to this life. The passage is not teaching that we will not know one another, and a class with widows and widowers in it needs to hear that distinction spoken gently.
- Luke 20:46–47 is a warning against religion performed for an audience. Apply it to the room, not to other congregations.

In Season and Out

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 3 is a diagnosis. The perilous times are not marked by persecution first but by disordered love: lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Notice that the list ends inside the church, with people having a form of godliness but denying its power. Paul is not describing the pagan world outside the walls; he is describing a religion with the engine removed, and he tells Timothy to turn away from such people.

Against that, Paul sets two anchors. The first is a life Timothy watched: you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, and afflictions. The second is the Scriptures Timothy has known since he was a small child, which are able to make him wise for salvation and which equip the man of God completely. Doctrine and life, page and person.

Then comes the charge, made in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead: preach the word. Everything else in the chapter follows from it. And after the charge, the most peaceful sentences a condemned man ever wrote. He has poured himself out, he has kept the faith, the crown is laid up. Then, being human, he asks Timothy to bring his coat, because Roman prisons are cold in winter.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Second Timothy is Paul's last letter, written from a Roman prison around A.D. 67, with his execution expected soon (4:6).
- Timothy is at Ephesus, a young preacher facing entrenched error and a congregation with an appetite for novelty (1 Timothy 1:3–7).
- The holy Scriptures Timothy knew from childhood were the Old Testament writings; Paul's statement in 3:16 applies to all that God has breathed out, which now includes the New Testament (2 Peter 3:15–16).
- Jannes and Jambres (3:8) are the traditional names of the magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7. Paul uses them as a picture of men who imitate the real thing and resist the truth.
- The last days in New Testament usage is the Christian age itself, begun at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–17; Hebrews 1:1–2), not a window of time just before the end of the world.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Second Timothy 3:16–17 says all Scripture is inspired and makes the man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Discuss what that claim rules out, and what it means for how we settle a disagreement in this congregation.*

All Scripture is God breathed. That claim rules out several things at once: that the Bible merely contains God's word in places, that Scripture is a record of human religious searching, and that anything further is needed to complete a Christian. If the sacred writings make the man of God complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work, then nothing essential is missing and no later revelation is required. Compare 2 Peter 1:3 and Jude 3, the faith once for all delivered.

Now bring it to the practical level, because that is where it bites. If Scripture settles matters, then a disagreement in a congregation is settled by asking what the text authorizes, not by asking what most people prefer, what a respected family wants, what other churches are doing, or what feels right. Ask the class to name a decision in front of them, real or typical, and walk through what it would look like to settle it Paul's way. That habit, taught patiently, protects a church for a generation.

Question 2. *Paul says a time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine but will heap up teachers to suit their own desires (4:3–4). Describe how that actually happens in a church, step by step, before anyone notices.*

Walk the steps out loud. It begins not with false teaching but with appetite: people accumulate teachers according to their own desires. The itch comes first; the scratching comes second. Next, the preferred message is the one that leaves the hearer as he is, so preaching that calls for repentance starts to feel harsh and preaching that flatters starts to feel loving. Then the plain passages get softened, then avoided, then explained away. Finally, Paul says, they turn their ears from the truth and are turned aside to fables.

Notice the responsibility Paul assigns. He does not blame the false teachers first; he says hearers heap them up. A congregation largely gets the preaching it rewards. Ask the class an uncomfortable question: when was the last time a sermon made you genuinely uncomfortable, and what did you do with it? The answer to that question, multiplied across a membership, determines what a church will be in ten years.

Question 3. *Read 4:6–8 aloud. Paul says he has finished the course and kept the faith, and that a crown waits for him and for all who love Christ's appearing. What kind of life, lived over decades, arrives at that paragraph?*

Work backward from the paragraph. The crown is not the reward of a dramatic finish but of a long obedience that had already been tested at Lystra, Philippi, Ephesus, and a dozen places in between (3:10–11). Paul describes his life as a drink offering being poured out, which is the language of a slow, deliberate giving away rather than a single heroic act. He can say I have kept the faith because he kept it on the ordinary Tuesdays.

Be careful with verse 8. Paul says the crown is for him and for all who have loved Christ's appearing, which is a description of a whole life's direction. He does not say the crown was guaranteed to him regardless of how he finished; he had already written in 1 Corinthians 9:27 about the danger of being disqualified, and Demas appears two verses later in this very chapter. Assurance in the New Testament is real, and it belongs to people who are still fighting the fight. Ask the class what they want said honestly about them at the end, and then ask what would have to change this month for it to be true.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the traits of people in the perilous times of 3:2–5. How many of them are about love, and what are those loves attached to?*

The list includes lovers of self, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Three of the traits are loves, and the first and last frame the whole list. The problem is not that these people love nothing but that they love themselves and their pleasures in the place where God belongs.

2. *Paul tells Timothy that from childhood he has known the holy Scriptures (3:14–15). Read Acts 16:1 and 2 Timothy 1:5 and write out who taught him and what that cost them.*

Acts 16:1 says Timothy's mother was a believing Jewess and his father a Greek, and 2 Timothy 1:5 names his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Teaching a boy the Scriptures in a mixed home, apparently without the father's participation, took persistence over years with no guarantee of the outcome. Answers will vary on the cost; look for recognition that faithfulness in a household is slow work done mostly without applause.

3. *Count the commands packed into 4:2 and 4:5. Which one is hardest for a preacher, and which one is hardest for an ordinary member?*

Second Timothy 4:2 gives preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. Verse 5 adds be watchful, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. Answers will vary, but most classes land on rebuke as hardest for the preacher and longsuffering as hardest for the member who wants a problem fixed immediately.

4. Demas forsook Paul, having loved this present world (4:10). Read 1 John 2:15–17 and Colossians 4:14, where Demas is still a fellow worker. What does the pairing of those verses teach about how a fall usually happens?

In Colossians 4:14 Demas is named alongside Luke as a fellow worker; here he has forsaken Paul, having loved this present world. Nobody decides in a moment to abandon an imprisoned apostle. First John 2:15–17 shows the mechanism: love for the world and love for the Father compete for the same room, and the world's appeal is to the flesh, the eyes, and pride. Falls are usually slow, and they are almost always preceded by an affection nobody addressed.

5. Somebody handed you the Scriptures the way Lois and Eunice handed them to Timothy. Name that person, and name one person you will deliberately teach something to this week. Put the day on your calendar before you close this page.

Answers will vary. Insist on two names and one date. A vague intention to be more evangelistic produces nothing; a coffee on Thursday with a specific person produces a conversation. Teachers should follow up the next week and ask.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The last days of 3:1 refers to the Christian age, which began at Pentecost. Do not let the class turn the passage into a clock for the end of the world or a commentary on current headlines.
- Second Timothy 3:16–17 settles the sufficiency of Scripture. Use it to teach plainly and kindly that God is not giving new revelation today, and that the confirming miracles served to confirm a word now complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).
- Second Timothy 4:8 must not be turned into once saved, always saved. Demas is in the same chapter. The crown belongs to those who finish, and Paul says so in the same breath as he says he has finished.
- Second Timothy 4:2 is a charge to a preacher, but the pattern of speaking the truth with longsuffering belongs to every member. Do not let the class treat sound doctrine as the staff's department.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Jeremiah 6–9 · Psalm 98–101 · Luke 21 · Titus 1–3

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