

Adult Teaching Resources

November 24, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

All Saints Day

Ephesians 1:11-23 – “At Home with the Saints”

Random Readings

Luke 20:27-38 – “Trick Questions”

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 – “Right Things”

Colossians 1:11-20 – “Blown Minds”

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Blown Minds

Colossians 1:11-20

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience ...” Colossians 1:11

The old saying goes, “I don’t know how God works. I just know that God works.” When God works in us and through us, great things can happen. We can’t explain it. We don’t always recognize it, but God gives us confidence and strength and ability we didn’t know we had.

In today’s passage, we explore Paul’s words to the Colossians about the confidence and strength that comes from God.

Opening

After everyone arrives, have your group form smaller groups of 3-4. Once everyone is settled, ask each person to share two stories from their experience. The first story is a time in their life when they had to fake confidence in order to get something done. In other words, when did they have to “fake it until they made it?”

The second story is a time in their life when they had the confidence and felt it all the way through the situation. When were they strong and courageous?

Give each small group time to share. Then ask these questions for small group and large group discussion.

Did you act differently when you had no confidence versus when you were totally confident? How so? Could other people tell?

What left you with little confidence in the first story?

What gave you the confidence in the second story?

Do you prefer to live on the edge with no confidence or be secure with great confidence in situations? Why do you say that?

Reading the Bible

With what will make us strong? (the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father)

What has the Father done? (enabled[a] you[b] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.)

What did he rescue us from? (the power of darkness)

Where did he transfer us to? (into the kingdom of his beloved Son)

What is Christ the image of? (the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation)

What happened in him? (all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him)

What does Jesus do? (is before all things, and in[e] him all things hold together)

How is Jesus described? (He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything)

Where was the fullness of God pleased to dwell? (in Jesus)

Where was God pleased to reconcile all things? (in Jesus)

How did God make peace? (through the blood of his cross)

Making Connections

In explaining Paul's letter to the church at Colossae, our Lesson Writer says, "Paul wrote to defend his understanding of the gospel and to insist on this belief: Jesus is enough." Have you ever been challenged to believe or live in a way that demanded Jesus and something else? Share your experience.

As a believer and Jesus-follower, where do you see yourself fitting in the world? Where do other people place you in the world? Does conversation, or specific words, change when you are around? Do you feel "set apart" from others because of your faith and discipleship?

When has someone specifically prayed for you? Who prayed? What was the situation? How did you know that person prayed for you? What happened with your situation? How did that person's prayers affect your relationship and understanding of God?

When have you prayed specifically for someone else? What was the situation? Did the person know you were praying for him or her? How did that experience affect your relationship and understanding of God?

What is your attitude toward God when everything around you is full of light and joy? What is your attitude toward God when everything around you is dark and more somber? Should there be a difference?

Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer says, “Jesus is enough. We can have confidence that the love and power of God in Christ are sufficient to release us from sin’s dark clutches, bring us into God’s light, and give us the strength and wisdom we need to grow with patience and joy.” How do you respond to that idea? How do you try to live that out?

When you think of the divine, is your first inclination to think of God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit? Regardless of which you choose, what does the divine look like to you?

Our Lesson Writer says, “Paul declared that Christ is not only the creator, but the sustainer of the universe. On those days when we may feel that our world is falling apart, it is helpful to recall Paul’s affirmation that Christ holds all things together.” When your world seems to be falling apart, to whom or what do you first turn? When do you turn specifically to Jesus?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather with their smaller group from the beginning of the lesson. Share with them the words from our Lesson Writer, “for God in Christ has reconciled all things to himself through his death on the cross (v. 20). Whatever is fragmented or fractured in the universe, Christ has the power to make whole – including us.”

Ask each small group to spend time thinking and talking about that truth. Then, have them put into words what that means to them—ideally, with words that make sense to someone unfamiliar with God, Jesus, and the cross. How would each small group share this incredibly good news with someone who has never heard it before?

Give each group time to think and share with each other. Then, ask each group to share their ideas with the larger group.

Close your lesson by affirming each group’s effort to share an important theological concept with those who have never heard the good news.

The Challenge

This week, share your group’s words of good news with someone who needs to hear about Jesus. Thank God for the opportunities you have.

Prayer

Loving God, as people of faith, we often take your divinity and Jesus and the cross for granted. It is so much a part of who we are that we forget others don’t know this great news. Give us the words to share to blow the minds, in a good way, of those who need to know you. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Colossae—Colossae was a small city in the southwest part of Asia Minor (now Turkey), in an area known as Phrygia, about 100 miles inland from the port city of Ephesus. Colossae was near the head of the Lycus River, a tributary of the Meander River (the source of our English word “meander,” referring to a wandering track), and not far from Laodicea and Heiropolis. Colossae was famous at one time for its textile industry, which featured wool products from local sheep dyed a deep red color.

By the time Paul wrote his letter to the church in Colossae, the town was in decline, but still had a cosmopolitan population of local Phrygians, Jews, Greeks, and Syrians. The diverse population held to a variety of religious traditions, out of which a syncretism emerged that Paul saw as a threat to the Christians’ dependence on Jesus alone.

Thanksgiving—One has to admire a man who could sit in prison, having done no wrong, and yet find reason to rejoice. Paul wrote this letter while being held captive by the Roman authorities on charges that his preaching was dangerous to the government.

Paul wrote to a church that was facing hardships of its own. Yet, Paul exuded a spirit of gratitude and encouraged the Colossians to “endure everything with patience while giving thanks to the Father ...” (vv. 11b-12a).

In his commentary on Colossians for the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Smyth & Helwys, 2013), Nijay K. Gupta cites a book by Ellen Charry called *God and the Art of Happiness* (Eerdmann’s, 2010). Charry notes that we have a natural tendency to base our sense of happiness on circumstances, and when conditions are bleak enough, our only hope of real joy gets pushed into an anticipation of heaven.

But Charry argues that believers can have true happiness now, even in the midst of trouble, when we realize that the saving relationship we have with Christ is not just about a blissful eternity, but involves “growing into the wisdom of divine love and enjoying oneself in the process” (Charry, p. x; cited in Gupta, p. 75).

A hymn?—While both stylistic and linguistic evidence support the position that vv. 15-20 are poetic in nature, its intended structure is not altogether clear. It is likely that the introductory words “He is the ...” followed in the next line by “The firstborn of ...” are intended to be parallel introductions to two sections, vv. 15-17 and vv. 18-20.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Seeing God—The Old Testament speaks of occasions when God took on a visible manifestation. We're familiar with the stories of how God appeared as a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day to guide the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt. In other stories, God appeared in human form to Abraham (Genesis 18) and to Jacob (Gen. 32:22-30). These were special occasions, however, and people generally thought of God as too dangerous to look upon.

Authority—In patriarchal societies such as ancient Israel, firstborn sons occupied a special place in the family. They received a double share of the inheritance when the father died, and they took over his position of leadership over the remainder of the family. Thus, the first born was also in first place, given authority over his other siblings. This is why, for example, the conflict between Jacob and Esau was so fierce: they were twins, but Esau emerged first, and was thus had the “birthright” that would ultimately give him authority over his very slightly younger brother. Jacob, recognizing the significance (and the unfairness) of the situation, persuaded Esau to sell his birthright, and later fooled his father into giving him the firstborn blessing intended for Esau.

The meaning of “firstborn,” then, has its roots in birth order, but came to be used as a common term for whoever was in first place, for the one who had authority and power over others.

The body of Christ—Paul often spoke of the church as the body of Christ, as in Rom. 12:5: “so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” For similar affirmations, see Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 6:15, 12:12, 27; Eph. 3:6, 4:12; and Col. 2:19, 3:15.

Revealing a mystery—When Paul spoke of his message as a formerly hidden mystery that had now been unveiled, he was using language that was common to Jewish apocalyptic writings, and it is likely that the false teachers in and around Colossae were using similar language, too.

Paul believed the gospel message was a mystery that had been revealed, but he did not see it as a secret to be hoarded and parceled out to “true believers” who might pay for advanced courses in faith. Rather, the mystery was simply that God’s plan of redemption includes everyone, Gentiles as well as Jews, and he sought to proclaim it so widely that it would no longer be a mystery, but known to all.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What did Paul mean by calling Jesus “the firstborn from the dead”?

In v. 18, Paul speaks of Christ by saying “He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.”

What does he mean by “the firstborn from the dead?” Some interpreters see “firstborn” as indicating priority in time as well as rank, thinking of Christ as the first person ever to rise from the dead. The problem with this is that the Bible speaks of other people being raised from the dead, including dead boys raised by Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:18-37), and two people that Jesus raised from the dead (the synagogue ruler’s daughter, Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; and Lazarus, John 11:1-44).

But Paul clearly had in mind a different kind of resurrection. When Jesus was resurrected after the crucifixion, he did not simply come back to life as a reanimated body, returning to the quotidian routines of daily life. Jesus arose in a resurrection body – however we are to understand what that means – rather than simply resuming his earthly form. In Acts 26:13, Paul testified of Christ as “the first to rise from the dead.” In 1 Cor. 15:20 he spoke of Christ’s resurrection as “the firstfruits of those who have died.” Paul was not alone. In Rev. 1:5, the elder John spoke of Jesus as “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

In this sense, Paul’s expression seems to indicate a belief in the early church that Jesus’ resurrection and return to heaven opened the way for others to be resurrected in eternity, as well. If pressed too hard, this contradicts Jesus’ own teaching. In responding to a trick question from the Sadducees, Jesus had argued that God would not have self-identified to Moses as being “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” unless those early patriarchs were still living, presumably in the presence of God (Exod. 3:6, Luke 20:37-38). At the Transfiguration, as Jesus took on a different appearance, clothed in shining white, Moses and Elijah appeared with him, apparently in something other than an ordinary human body (Mark 9, Matthew 17).

Thus, one could cite texts to suggest that Jesus was not technically the first to live, die, and be resurrected to eternal life with God. Paul argued, however, that Christ was the firstborn of all creation (v. 15) as well as the “firstborn of the dead” (v. 18). From the perspective of believers, Jesus’ death and resurrection that opens the way for us to be saved makes him “the firstborn from the dead.”

From another perspective, we note that the word *prototokos* does not necessarily indicate birth order, as it appears, but can also refer to one’s priority in position and power. Paul wanted to convey that Christ is first in every way.