

Adult Teaching Resources

July 19, 2020



What the World Needs Now...

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30—"The World Needs Rest"

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23—"The World Needs the Word"

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43—"The World Needs Patience"

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52—"The World Needs Wisdom"

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The World Needs Patience

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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

Key Verse: Matthew 13:43—Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

What are we to do with those church-goers who live one way at church and a totally different way in the world? They show up for church and do all the right churchy things, but then on Sunday at 1:00, they get right back into the world and live by worldly standards.

Shouldn't we hold them accountable and kick them out of church?

This is an age-old question that Jesus addressed in another parable. Today we'll explore the parable of weeds among the wheat.

Opening

After everyone arrives, keep everyone in the large group. Share this scenario for conversation:

A member of your church, a regular attender and maybe even someone with some leadership positions, lives one way while at church and a totally different way while not at church. To make it simple, they wear the "church hat" on Sundays and the clothes "of the world" the rest of the week. It is clear that church and faith are a part of their life, but it's also clear that the ways of the world might be even more a part of their life.

What should the church do when they find out a member of their congregation lives this way?

Should that person be kicked out of church? Should that person be put on some type of "church probation?" Should that person be left alone? Should that person be called out publicly for his/her actions?

Open the floor for thoughts and conversation. Give everyone the floor and ask others to hold their comments about what the previous person said. Make it a safe place for folks to share their thoughts, knowing that some might have totally different ideas on how to handle this situation.

Reading the Bible

What does Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to in this parable? (someone who sowed good seed in his field)

What happened to the field while everyone was asleep? (an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat)

What happened when the plant came up and bore grain? (the weeds appeared as well)

What did the slaves say to their master? ('Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?')

How did the master reply? ('An enemy has done this')

What did the slaves offer to do? (go and gather the weeds)

What was the master's solution? (to let them both grown together until the harvest so that both could be collected. The weeds would be burned. The wheat would go into the barn)

What did the disciples want from Jesus? (an explanation to the parable)

Who sows the good seed? (the Son of Man)

What is the field? (the world)

What is the good seed? (the children of the kingdom)

What are the weeds? (the children of the evil one)

Who is the enemy who sowed the weeds? (the devil)

What is the harvest? (the end of the age)

Who are the reapers? (the angels)

What will the angels do? (they will collect all causes of sin and evildoers and they will throw them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth)

What will the righteous do? (they will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father)

Making Connections

This parable is another story that involves planting and seeds—something common in Jesus' day. What would be an appropriate metaphor that most contemporary hearers would understand?

Share your experience of gardening and tending to plants or crops. How much weeding did you do? How much weeding did you need to do? What happened to the areas where you didn't weed?

Have you ever had the experience where something bad has come in and taken over something good? What was the good? What was the bad? How did the bad come in? What

Making Connections *continued*

did you do to try to get rid of the bad? Did it work?

Is it ever a good idea to let the bad remain with the good and then at the right time, work to separate the two? What are the consequences for doing it that way? Is it worth the work to do it that way?

What do you think motivates someone to sabotage someone else's "good crop?"

In explaining the parable, our Lesson Writer says, "The time of harvest represents the final judgment at the end of the age, when angels would separate the children of the kingdom from the children of the evil one. The latter would be thrown "into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," while the righteous would "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (vv. 37-43)." What is your understanding and belief about the final judgment at the end of the age?

How is it possible that the world created by God, has good seed and bad seed in it? How is it possible that the church has good seed and bad seed in it?

When you spend time with others and observe their life and actions, how certain are you of their true, rooted, intentions? Can you tell if they are wheat or weeds?

So What?

Remaining in the large group, share with them this brief summary of the parable from our Lesson Writer.

"The primary point of the parable is not that there will be a judgment and an ultimate separation between good and evil: that was assumed. The intent of the parable is to answer the question of why such judgment was delayed, and to remind believers that judgment is God's business, not ours."

Ask this set of questions for discussion and conversation:

Having read this parable, how are we to treat others around us?

What is our individual responsibility with judgment?

What is the church's responsibility?

What is God's responsibility?

How can we live faithful lives knowing there are weeds among us?

The Challenge

This week, spend some time examining your own life, looking for the weeds that are choking your faith. Make a list and an action plan to rid those weeds from your life.

Prayer

Loving God, you give us simple stories with deep meanings in which to live our lives. Thank you for knowing us so well that we need something simple for something difficult. We all have weeds in our life. Help us to take care of our own weeds so that we can live with love and grace with others—knowing that you will take care of us all when the time comes. 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.

Ins and outs—The Gospel of Thomas reflects an early heresy known as “Gnosticism.” The Gnostics claimed to have secret mystical knowledge that could enable the initiated to ascend through various spiritual “spheres” on their way to heaven. Gnostics made a clear division between those who were “in” and “out,” those who had the secret knowledge and those on the outside. Thus, the Gospel of Thomas adapts the “wheat and weeds” parable from Matthew as a way of illustrating their idea of a separation between those with and without the Gnostic community.

The parable appears in logion 57:

Jesus said, “What the kingdom of the father resembles is a man who had a [good] (kind of) seed. His enemy came at night and scattered grass seed in with the good seed. The man did not let them pluck out the grass, saying to them, ‘Do not, lest you (plur.) go to pluck out the grass and then pluck out the wheat along with it. For, on the day of the harvest the grass will be obvious, and it will be plucked out and burned.’”

From Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: Ancient Wisdom for the New Age* (Doubleday, New York/London, 1987), accessed at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas57.html>.

Angelic reapers—Some readers may find it odd that angels would be involved in separating people for judgment, but they also appear in Matt. 24:30-31 as being dispatched to gather the elect in the eschaton. Angels are also described as having a role in judgment in Matt. 16:27 and 25:31-33.

Matthew was especially concerned about those who caused others to stumble (see 18:6-7), and in our text the angels gather “all causes of sin and all evil doers.” The word behind “causes of sin” is *skandalitzein*, or “cause to stumble,” the root of the English word “scandalize.” The translation “evildoers” is literally “those who do lawlessness.” The word “lawlessness” is from *anomia*, which is composed of the word for law (*nomos*) with the negative prefix *a*. They live without recognition or respect for the law—in this sense, biblical teachings of right and wrong.

Fire and sun—The image of the angelic reapers throwing the wicked into the fire (vv. 41 and 50) is taken from Dan. 3:6, where those who refused to worship the king’s image would be thrown into a “fiery furnace.” The developing concept of hell was drawn from the image of the valley of Hinnom (*Gehenna* in Hebrew and the Greek transcription). Located on the southwest side of Jerusalem, the narrow valley was used for many years as the city’s trash dump, where refuse was piled, dead animals or bodies were sometimes abandoned, and

Digging Deeper *continued*

fires were perpetual. Jeremiah accused certain kings of Judah of having offered sacrifices to Baal and even sacrificing their children to Molech at a place called “Topheth” (which means “burning”) in the Valley of Hinnom. Jeremiah cursed the valley, saying it would become a scene of slaughter and punishment (Jer. 7:30-34, 19:1-9). Not surprisingly, it came to symbolize a place of judgment.

The author of Matthew was particularly fond of the phrase “gnashing of teeth.” He used it six times (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), but it appears elsewhere only in Luke 13:28.

While judgment will bring punishment for the wicked, according to the text, the righteous will be rewarded, and will “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (v. 43). The verb for “shine” is the same one used of Jesus in Matthew’s version of the Transfiguration story (17:2), and recalls a phrase from Daniel 12:3: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

A holy ambiguity—Consider these thoughts from Theodore J. Wardlaw, as he ponders the instruction to let weeds and wheat grow together:

There is a strategy in these words of restraint that pushes away from premature clarity regarding such matters of discernment and makes room instead for a holy and purposeful ambiguity. This is not a vague and ungrounded “whatever” kind of ambiguity, but an ambiguity that is both wise and intentional. In our impatience with others, we often want to bring matters to a head and so determine whether others are in or out; but the God who is glimpsed in this parable models for us an infinite patience that frees us to get on with the crucial business of loving, or at least living with, each other. ...

On such a journey as this, it is not our job to determine who is within and who is beyond this God’s attention. It is rather our job to imagine everyone as belonging to this God, and therefore, with all that we can muster, to endeavor to embrace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, God’s holy and purposeful ambiguity.

(From *Feasting on the Word, Year A*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3 of Accordance electronic ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], paragraph 16588.)

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What is this weed?

Wheat and darnel are virtually indistinguishable until they mature enough for the heads of grain to form. At that point, wheat forms heads of grain in neat rows, while the heads of darnel are more gangly. Mature wheat turns brown, while the seeds of darnel are black.

Grains of the darnel plant not only dilute the wheat: they are poisonous enough to kill if eaten in sufficient quantities. Darnel seeds cause dizziness and nausea and have such hallucinogenic properties that the plant's scientific name is *Lolium temulentum*: the Latin word *temulentus* means "drunk."

Through the years, some have taken advantage of the weed's hallucinogenic properties. Reportedly, followers of Persephone and Demeter in ancient Greece used it to induce a frenzied state. In Europe, it was sometimes used as an anesthetic, but also baked into "dazed bread" or brewed into beer as a means of intentionally getting high. The plant is mentioned in a variety of literary illusions including Shakespeare, who portrayed King Lear as having darnel in his crown. (Source: Howard Thomas, Jayne Elisabeth Arther, and Richard Marggraf Turley, "Remembering Darnel, a Forgotten Plant of Literary, Religious, and Social Significance," *Journal of Ethnobiology* 36:1 (March 2016), 29-44), cited by Sarah Laskow at *Atlas Obscura*, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/wheats-evil-twin-has-been-intoxicating-humans-for-centuries>).

In the illustration at left, darnel is the plant on the left, wheat is on the right (from Otto Wilhelm Thomé *Flora von Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* 1885, Gera, Germany: Public Domain).

Modern agricultural methods have eliminated darnel as a threat, though it can still be a problem for subsistence farmers in underdeveloped countries.

