

Youth Teaching Resources

July 26, 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 Wisdom

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

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

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Find a picture that represents each parable that is part of this lesson and post it across your social media platforms. Post the picture and the scripture and use the hashtag #parables..

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Finding the Entrance” from *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize the clip, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What does he do to interpret the meaning of the clues?
- 2) What reaction do each of them have when they find the clues?
- 3) How is finding treasure a journey?
- 4) Who are people that have helped you along your journey?
- 5) How does your faith help you along your journey?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What do these three parables have in common? Why do you think their telling is grouped together?
- 2) What did the first hearers of these parables think of yeast? Why would Jesus use this image if it was to be thrown out of their homes at certain times of the year?
- 3) What treasures are found in these parables? Where do we find our treasures?
- 4) What does Jesus want the hearers of these parables to know?
- 5) How did Jesus teach by word and example?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What is hidden leaven?
- 2) How are images of mustard seeds and birds in a bush relevant today? What images might you use instead?
- 3) Does our popular phrase "Finders keepers" apply to this parable?
- 4) Are these parables a self-portrait of an early follower of Jesus?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": What is missing?

Transformation

Conclude your session by introducing the Social Media Challenge of the week:

Find a picture that represents each parable that is part of this lesson and post it across your social media platforms. Post the picture and the scripture and use the hashtag #parables.

After you have introduced the challenge, facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What is the power in parables?
- 2) What does it mean that we might interpret these parables differently?
- 3) What images first come to your mind when you read these parables?
- 4) Who have been some of the people in your life that have been treasures that help you grow?

Close with a prayer thanking God for all of the different ways that we can learn and grow.

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.

Mustard seeds—Modern readers might be familiar with mustard greens, but the ancients sometimes cultivated mustard for its seeds. As such a large plant, one wouldn’t typically plant mustard in a small garden, but a few in a field could come in handy. Mustard seeds could be used as spices, for medicinal purposes, or even for the extraction of oil.

Birds in the bush—The image of birds coming to nest in the rapidly growing mustard plant calls to mind Old Testament texts that speak of trees in which birds come to nest in their branches (Daniel 4:10-12; Ezekiel 17:22-24, 31:6). In Jewish thought, birds were sometimes used as symbols of the Gentiles.

Hidden leaven—While the NRSV and other translations say the woman “mixed” the leaven into the dough, the word used is *enkrypto*, which means “to hide.” It’s built from the root *krypto*, which is far more common: *enkrypto* is used only here in the New Testament. English words like cryptology and encryption, referring to secret codes, are derived from it.

Finders keepers?—The parable of the hidden treasure in a field does not say anything about why the treasure-finder was poking around in someone else’s field, nor does it speak to the ethics of buying someone’s land without disclosing the presence of a massive treasure. Was he looking for treasure, like someone crisscrossing the beach or a historic battlefield with a metal detector? We typically imagine that the man was a hired hand sent out to plow, but the story does not say so. Nor does the story identify the treasure or say how long it had been there: things we would like to know. Presumably, if the owner of the field had known about the treasure he would not have sold it, so perhaps the lucky finder/buyer felt justified in keeping it for himself.

Pearly drinks—Readers might be interested to know that the Greek word for pearl is *margarita*. The alcoholic drink known as a margarita probably gets its name from the Spanish word for “daisy.” It is similar to a brandy cocktail known as a “daisy” that was popular during Prohibition.

Some ancient stories associate pearls and drinking, though alcohol was not involved. Pliny noted that pearls were considered of utmost value in the Roman empire: more valuable than gold or rubies. He and several other Latin writers recount a story in which Cleopatra reportedly bet Mark Antony that she could finish off 10,000,000 sesterces’ worth of food and drink in a single meal. When it was time for the dessert course, a small dish of vinegar was brought to her. Cleopatra, according to the story, was wearing earrings made from the two largest pearls ever found, gifts of visiting kings. She removed one of her impressive pearls and put it in the vinegar, where it dissolved. She then drank it and won the wager by slurping up a highly valuable pearl.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Horace, another Latin writer known for his satire, told a similar story claiming that a certain son of the famous actor Aesopus took a pearl from the ear of an infamous woman named Metella, a celebrity of her time, and likewise dissolved it in vinegar. Horace commented that he might as well have thrown it into a river.

While I found these stories in Amy Jill Levine's *Short Stories of Jesus* (Harper Collins, 2014), pp. 146-147, the sources are Pliny, *Natural History* 9.119-21, and Horace, *Sermons* 2.3.239-42. They are also discussed in B. Ullman, "Cleopatra's Pearls," *Classical Journal* 52.5(1957), http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/journals/CJ/52/5/Cleopatras_Pearls*.html.

A self-portrait?—Commentators have often imagined that v. 52 is like the author's self-portrait: he thinks of himself as a Christian scribe who understands the new teachings of Jesus and is able to relate them to ancient teachings preserved in the Hebrew scriptures. Matthew constantly quotes from the Old Testament, seeing ways in which Jesus fulfilled or related to Israel's religious heritage.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question 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.

What's missing?

While Matthew has brought together several parables of the kingdom from a variety of sources, attentive readers might note that he omitted a related kingdom parable that he clearly had at his disposal. The author of Matthew often follows the gospel of Mark, who pairs the parable of the mustard seed with another short parable often referred to as “the seed growing secretly” (Mark 4:26-29).

Jesus said: “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself (*automatos*) the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

The main point seems to be that the kingdom was founded by God’s initiative, and God could be trusted to bring it to fruition. The verse about the harvest is a rough quotation of Joel 3:13, an Old Testament prophecy regarding the surety of a coming judgment. The main point, then, is that the seed grows by itself. We can neither “bring in the kingdom” nor predict the time of its ultimate revelation.

We can’t fully understand how the kingdom grows, but we can trust God that it will. Our tendency is to try and explain everything. I remember how delighted I was in biology class to learn something about how plants grow—how the apical meristem of a shoot undergoes continual mitosis, rapidly producing cells which then differentiate into xylem or phloem or cambium or epithelium—but none of that knowledge enabled me to actually make a seed grow. The seed grows by itself.

This is not to say that we have no place in the story. The first farmer was Jesus, sowing the seeds of the kingdom in the hearts and minds of his followers. But one of the secrets of kingdom growth is that Jesus’ followers are called to continue sowing the seed of Christ’s kingdom love. In other places, Jesus taught us not only to be faithful in sowing the seed by proclaiming the kingdom, but also to recognize that there is already a harvest in the field that needs to be brought in (Luke 10:2).

The growth of the kingdom is a cooperative venture. It is God who makes it grow, but we have a part in the sowing and the reaping as we work to bring others to Christ and as faithful subjects of the kingdom.

Why did Matthew not include this parable? Perhaps it is because he wanted to pair the parable of the mustard seed with the parable of the leaven, and thought those were sufficient illustration of how the kingdom grows mysteriously as the work of God. The other parables in the sequence emphasize the need for human response to the claims of the gospel.