Adult Teaching Resources

November 8, 2020

The Right Stuff

Matthew 23:1-12—"The Right Stance"

Matthew 25:1-13—"The Right Preparation"

Matthew 25:14-30—"The Right Investment"

Psalm 100— "Good God!"

Christmas Letters

1 Corinthians 1:1-9—"Every Good Gift"

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"The Right Preparation"

Matthew 25:1-13

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.

Key Text

Matthew 25:13—Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Opening

After everyone arrives, remain in the large group. Move to the board and record the answers to this question:

When was the longest time you had to wait for something?

Their answers could range from a couple of hours to multiple decades.

Then ask them what they were waiting for>

Your folks might list anything from a doctor's appointment to finally becoming "empty-nesters." Regardless of the answer, affirm it, and encourage everyone to share their longest "wait."

After you've compiled a good list, ask everyone to think back on what they did during the time they waited. Did they read a magazine, play on their phone, buy three houses and move across state lines?

Have them share their stories and strategies of filling time while waiting.

Finally, ask them to share what they hoped would happen when their wait was over. Were they waiting for the doctor and a specific diagnosis? A letter with good news? A time of peace? etc.

Have some conversation about the inevitability of waiting and having patience, even when we want something to happen immediately. Then, move on to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

The parable is about the ten bridesmaids; what is Jesus actually talking about? (the kingdom of heaven)

What did the ten bridesmaids take to meet the bridegroom? (their lamps)

Reading the Bible *continued*

How many of the bridesmaids were foolish and how many were wise? (five of each)

What distinguished the difference? (the foolish took no oil with them; the wise took flasks of oil with them)

What happened when the bridegroom was delayed? (they bridesmaids got drowsy and fell asleep)

What happened at midnight? (the bridegroom arrived and the bridesmaids all trimmed their lamps)

What did the foolish ones say to the wise ones? (give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out)

What did the wise ones reply? (No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better for to the dealers and buy some for yourselves)

What happened when the foolish ones went to buy oil? (the bridegroom came, those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut)

What did the foolish bridesmaids say when they finally got back? (Lord, lord, open to us)

What was the response? (Truly I tell you, I do not know you)

Why should they keep awake? (we know neither the day nor the hour)

Making Connections

Today's passage is a great parable about patience and continued faithfulness. What other parables (from scripture or not) or stories come to mind that teach about patience and continued faithfulness?

Are you someone who prepares and is a planner or someone who is more spontaneous and flies by the seat of his/her pants? What are the advantages of being a planner? What are the advantages of being spontaneous?

Have you ever been a part of someone else's wedding? What was your role? What would have happened if you were late or not prepared for the wedding?

What do you do when you have to wait for someone? How do you treat him/her when that person finally arrives?

When have you been prepared for something, but the person next to you wasn't prepared? What was the situation? What happened to you? What happened to that person? How did you feel about it all?

Making Connections *continued*

When have you missed out on something you wanted to do? Why did you miss out? What did you do instead?

How do you feel when someone misses out on something fun/important because they were late or unprepared? What do you think is the right response for someone in that situation? If you were the one in charge, like the bridegroom, what would you do? Why?

Would you rather go through life knowing exactly when and where and how things would occur or go through life not knowing? Does knowing or not knowing make a difference in how you make preparations?

So What?

Remaining in the large group, share the words from our Lesson Writer, "The point is that the women were not ready for the bridegroom's arrival. Church members who are wise should take note and live faithfully, ready to meet Christ whether at the Parousia or at their own death."

Ask your group to think about what is necessary for living faithfully, as we all move toward meeting Christ.
What must we do?

Record their answers on the board. As you compile a long list, ask the group how well they are already doing the listed things and how many items need work.

What specific steps can be taken to improve?
What extra steps need to be added to what we're already doing?
When time comes and the bridegroom arrives, what do you want to hear?

Give your group time to share with each other, focusing on specific action items that can transform today's discipleship into something deeper.

The Challenge

This week, take one item from the board and incorporate it into your daily walk with Jesus. Take one small step to being better prepared.

Prayer

Loving God, you give us great stories to help us understand difficult topics. Help us to prepare ourselves every day. We don't know when and we don't know how, but we know we need to be ready for you. Help us put away any procrastination and laziness. Meeting you and being ready for you should be a high priority for us. 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.

Another sermon on the mount?—Matthew 24:3-25:46 is sometimes described as the "Second Sermon on the Mount," because the author places it in the context of Jesus speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. The section begins with an apocalyptic discourse in which Jesus speaks of trials and tribulations that would precede the end times, when Jesus would return in glory (24:3-44).

The discourse implied that such things would happen soon: "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place" (24:34). He went on, however, to insist that no one knew the exact day or hour when he would return, insisting that his followers must be ready, "for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour" (24:44).

This is followed by four stories, all of which counsel readiness for Christ's return. The first, concerning an overseer of other slaves who grows negligent in his duty while the master was away, was probably directed at church leaders (24:45-51). The second, our text for today, is the account of wise and foolish maidens awaiting a bridegroom and his wedding feast (25:1-13). It was directed toward church members in general. The third parable, concerning servants entrusted with varying amounts of financial responsibility while their master was away, urged believers to make maximum use of their abilities while awaiting Christ's return (25:14-30). The fourth, concerning the "sheep and goats" judgment, connected the verdict to our willingness to serve Christ by serving others, apparently as a mark of genuine faith (25:31-46).

Only Matthew—Both Mark and Luke include stories about the importance of watching while waiting (Mark 13:33–37; Luke 12:35–38, 13:25-28), and the accounts include some elements similar to this one (sleeping, weddings, alertness). They are sufficiently different, however, to indicate that Matthew derived the story from his own special source.

Lamps—The English word "lamp" comes directly from the Greek word, lampas. First century lamps were typically simple vessels stamped or molded from clay and filled with olive oil, into which a wick was inserted. One of the reasons olive oil was so important to the ancients is that it was used for lighting as well as cooking.

Negotiations—Ancient Hebrews, like many societies, had a custom in which the father of a prospective bride would receive a gift (known as a *mohar*) from the groom or the groom's representative as a way of sealing a betrothal, which was a more serious arrangement than many engagements today. Though sometimes referred to as a "bride price," the transaction was not seen as a straightforward purchase. Still, the gift helped to offset the financial loss of a daughter who was no longer contributing to her parents' household.

Marriages typically took place among people of similar social and financial status. Often the dowry given to the bride was roughly equivalent to the betrothal gift, so there was little effective transfer of wealth.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Does the bridesmaids' supply of oil represent good works?

We suggested in the printed commentary that connecting the virgins' supply of oil to good deeds is pushing the allegory too far. If that were the case, we would have to imagine that good works could also burn out, be stored up against future needs, or bought from a store.

Those who believe the burning oil lamps represent continuous good works as a required element of readiness for the kingdom often point to the heartsick cry of the foolish virgins who had come too late and found the door shut. They cried "Lord, lord, open to us," but the bridegroom responded, "Truly, I tell you, I do not know you" (vv. 11-12).

The interchange calls to mind an occasion in which Jesus warned against false followers, saying, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'" (Matt. 7:21-23).

We note that both interactions suggest the context of the final judgment, and in both cases those who say "Lord, lord" are turned away and told some version of "I don't know you." In Matthew 7, however, those who are turned away have apparently done good deeds, even to the extent of prophesying, casting out demons, and working miracles in Christ's name.

It is not what they have done that counts, but what was in their heart. There is more to "doing the will of my Father in heaven" than preaching or performing mighty works. The skeptical among us wonder if the false believers Jesus spoke of would have been telling the truth in their claims: knowing their hearts and self-directed motivation, would Jesus have allowed them to prophesy, cast out demons, and perform miracles in his name?

Whatever preparation is required for meeting Jesus, it is not defined by the steady accomplishment of good works right up to the decisive moment. Otherwise, what would be the point of grace? Deeds done in hope of reward may accomplish good things but grow from a selfish motivation.

The parable does not spell out for us precisely what it means to be prepared when Jesus comes. At the least, being ready must have its roots in a heart that is focused on living out the grace we have received, knowing that any day on the calendar could be the day we meet Jesus.