

# Adult Teaching Resources

February 5, 2023



## Season of Epiphany: What Does God Expect?

February 5, 2023—Matthew 5:13-20—“Demanding Action”

February 12, 2023—Matthew 5:21-37—“Getting Serious”

February 19, 2023—Matthew 17:1-19—“Keeping Secrets”

## Season of Lent: What Faith Produces

February 26, 2023—Romans 5:12-19—“Unearned Righteousness”

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# Demanding Action

*Matthew 5:13-20*

## 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.

### Key Verse

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. (Matt. 5:17)*

### Opening

After everyone arrives, have your large group form smaller groups of 3-4. Once everyone is settled, share that Jesus had a way of shifting the way we see the world.

Ask everyone to think of a long-held belief or idea they had, until they learned that Jesus had an opposite, or different, view of the world.

Have everyone share their answers with their small group.

What was your long-held belief or idea?

What was Jesus' belief or idea?

What did you do when you learned you weren't aligned with Jesus?

Give each small group time to share and then open the floor for large group conversation and discussion before moving to the Bible.

### Reading the Bible

What are we said to be? (salt)

What question is asked about salt? (if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?)

What happens to bad salt? (It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot)

What else are we said to be? (the light of the world)

What should we do with a lamp? (put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.)

Why should we let our light shine? (so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven)

What had Jesus come to do with the Law and the prophets? (he came not to abolish but to fulfill)

## Reading the Bible *continued*

Who will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven? (whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same)

Who will be called great in the kingdom of heaven? whoever does them and teaches the commandments and teaches others to do the same)

What does Jesus say? (unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven)

## Making Connections

How many uses can you think of for salt? How many of those uses do you actually do? Can you think of another substance that is as versatile as salt?

Our Lesson Writer says, “Jesus used the metaphor (salt) to challenge his followers to add a lasting and flavorful quality to their communities and the world.” What other metaphor(s) can you think of that add a lasting and flavorful quality to communities and the world?

What is the brightest light (other than the sun) you have seen? Where was it? What was it used to illuminate?

What is your most visible act of faith? When did you do it? How often do you do it? How do others react and respond when they see you?

Which of Jesus’ teachings seem to be at odds with our contemporary laws and ordinances? Why do you think we have those differences? What do you think our world would be like if we focused more on Jesus’ way? What do you think our world would be like if we focused less on Jesus’ way?

Our Lesson Writer says, “To fulfill the law is to understand and live out God’s purpose in giving the law.” What do you think was God’s purpose in giving the law? What was God hoping to have happen with the giving of the law? How does God want us to live?

How was Jesus the embodiment of the law? What are parts of the law you find blatantly obvious because of Jesus? What are parts of the law you find more obscure because of Jesus?

Our Lesson Writer reminds us, “People of Jesus’ day regarded the scribes and Pharisees, who sought to fulfill every requirement of an expanded law as being especially righteous...” Who do we regard today as being especially righteous? How do we treat them? How should we respond to them?

## So What?

Ask everyone to gather back together with their small groups from the beginning of the lesson. Have each group to make a list of all the practical ways they be salt and light in the world. Then, have each group make a list of all the practical ways they can bring salt and light to the people in our lives.

## So What? *continued*

Give each group time to make their lists, then have each group share their lists with the larger group.

After all the groups have shared, spend time in conversation and discussion about how to make those lists an everyday part of their lives.

## The Challenge

This week, choose one practical way to bring salt and light into the world and do it.

## Prayer

Loving God, thank you for salt and light and everything else that enhances life. Help us to be the salt and light you want for the world. Give us the courage we need as we live for 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.

**Jesus as teacher and sage**—Matthew’s gospel, more than the others, portrays Jesus as a teacher and his disciples as learners. The Greek word *mathētēs*, translated as “disciple,” literally means “learner.” It occurs 73 times in Matthew, compared to 46 times in Mark and 37 times in Luke. Though Jesus’ disciples referred to him as Lord, when others approached Jesus, they typically called him “rabbi” or “teacher.” As we read and interpret Matthew’s gospel, it is helpful for us to consider Jesus’ teachings as those of a wise sage explaining how things are—and how they should be—to his students. For more on the sapiential character of the First Gospel, see Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentaries (Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 16-21.

**Salt and groceries**—When I was a boy, the highlight of the year was our family’s hog-killing day. When the weather turned cold and the hogs were fattened up, the extended family would come together at my great-grandmother’s house. We’d gather in the back yard to slaughter the hogs, butcher the meat, render the lard, squeeze out the cracklings, and thoroughly clean the “chittlins.” We had refrigeration, so most of the meat was packaged and frozen, but the hams were covered with salt and hung in the smokehouse, while slabs of fatback were dropped into a large wooden box of salt to be thoroughly coated and deeply massaged with the earth’s natural preservative.

Before refrigeration, salt was a primary means of preserving meat, fish, and vegetables.

In our world, salt has become so inexpensive that we’re tempted to use too much of it, but it is no less valuable. Can you imagine a life with no salt at all?

**Salt and wisdom**—Though it’s rarely mentioned in a discussion of this text, the rabbis often used salt as a metaphor for wisdom. The verb Jesus used for salt “losing its savor” literally meant “to grow foolish.” One who had surrendered his wisdom for foolishness was like salt that had lost its potency.

Jesus may also have been using wordplay that is lost to us in the Greek-to-English translation of the New Testament. Jesus’ native language would have been Aramaic, and it is likely that he taught in that language. Ben Witherington III has noted that Jesus may have made an intentional play on words: the Aramaic word for salt is *tabel*, and the Aramaic word *tapel* means “foolish” (*Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Commentaries [Smyth & Helwys: 2006], 124).

## Digging Deeper *continued*



**Lamps**—While larger lampstands like the temple Menorah could be used in public places, most homes depended on small oil lamps, usually with one wick, but sometimes more.

This Herodian style oil lamp reportedly dates from the late first century BCE, or the early first century CE.

**Salt and light**—Matthew is not alone in reporting Jesus' use of salt and light as metaphors for faithful living. See also

Mark 4:21, 9:50; and Luke 8:16, 11:33, 14:34. Note that the different evangelists set these comments at different places in Jesus' ministry.

**Introducing antitheses**—The collection of teachings in the Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes (5:1-12), followed by a challenge for Jesus' followers to be salt and light in the world (5:13-16). Prior to a series of teachings that will challenge various aspects of the law, Jesus makes sure his listeners do not think of him as an antinomian who makes light of the law. He insists that he had come to fulfill the law as God intended it, and that no element of the law would seek to exist until all things had been made complete (5:17-20). He then launched into a series of antithetical teachings that challenged various aspects of the law and how it had been previously interpreted. These six antitheses address the topics of murder/anger (5:21-26), adultery/lust (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), revenge (5:38-42), and love (5:43-48). In some cases, Jesus allows behaviors that the law prohibited. In others, Jesus makes demands that go beyond what the law allowed. These will be the subject of our Bible studies for the next two weeks.

## 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.

### Was Jesus inconsistent in his comments about the law?

What Jesus has to say about the law in vv. 17-20 can appear confusing. On the one hand, he said “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” He went on to say, with some emphasis, “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished” (vv. 17-18). The familiar “not one jot or one tittle” of the King James Version is a direct translation that makes the statement even more emphatic. “Jot” translates “*iota*,” the smallest Greek letter, equivalent in some ways to the small Hebrew letter *yod*, which resembles an apostrophe. The word “tittle” refers to tiny strokes that distinguish two similar letters. In the Hebrew script current in Jesus’ day, for example, the letters *daleth* and *resh* (ד and ר) are very similar, with the exception that the upper line of the *daleth* extends a bit beyond the edge, like a small horn. That’s a tittle. After declaring that jots and tittles would not pass away, Jesus went on to say that those who break even the least commandment, or who taught others to do so, would be counted least in the kingdom of heaven (v. 19).

In short order, however, Jesus began a series of six teachings in which he challenged traditional Jewish understandings of the law, giving them new interpretations (vv. 21-48). In his ministry, Jesus showed little concern for Jewish purity rituals or Sabbath rules that were based on current interpretations of the law. How, then, could he say that not one letter of the law would pass away until all was fulfilled? How could Jesus take such liberties with the law while not invalidating it?

We note, first of all, that Jesus was talking about more than the law. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets,” he said. “I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill.” Jesus came to fulfill both the law and the prophets—to bring both the guiding law and the hoped-for promises of Israel to the end that God intended. In some cases, that meant a radical revisioning of God’s purpose in establishing a law, or speaking through a prophet. The advent of Jesus brought the world to a new place, a new eschatological reality pointing toward ultimate fulfillment when God brings all things to an end and creates a new heaven and a new earth. At that time, there would be no need for the old laws and prophecies.

In the meantime, it was important for people to understand God’s desired purpose in giving the law or speaking through the prophets. In the new reality introduced by Jesus, some aspects of the law were no longer needed (animal sacrifice, for example), while other laws needed to be understood within a broader application. For Jews who chose to continue living under the law, Jesus insisted that they must observe it all. Those who followed Jesus into the life of the kingdom might no longer need to follow every ritual demand, but they would learn that the call to love as Jesus loved could be even more demanding.