

Youth 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”

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.
Find links and videos related to this lesson.

Demanding Action

Matthew 5:13-20

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Robert Tackett-Evans

This youth 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.

Gathering

As the group gathers, take a few moments to reflect on last week's challenge. After everyone has been able to share, continue with today's lesson.

Opening Activity

As you begin, challenge everyone:

- What purposes does salt serve?
- Follow that question by asking everyone to name as many things we use salt for as possible.
- What do you think the world would be like if we had no salt?

Listening to the Scripture

Read Matthew 5:13-20 aloud.

- What words, phrases, or images stand out to you in this scripture? (*As things are named, encourage individuals to say more about why those things stand out.*)
- Consider what Jesus said for a moment. If you were going to say these things today, how would you say them?
- What do you think it means for us to be “salt of the earth?” What do you think it looks like in practice?
- Jesus tells us we are to let our light shine for others to see. Are there ever times when we're afraid to let our light shine? What are some of those times?
- How do you think Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets?
- Do you ever think there are times we become too legalistic in our understanding of what God requires of us? Name some examples when that has happened.

If the group would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

- What do you think it means to say we are disciples of Jesus?
- If “disciple” means “learner,” what are the implications for our lives to call ourselves disciples?

Listening to the Scripture *continued*

If the group is up for a challenge, discuss what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*:

- Was Jesus inconsistent in his comments about the law?

Application

Before closing, introduce this week's challenge.

What is one practical way you could let your light shine this week?

Close with prayer.

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.