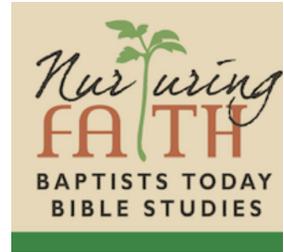


Adult Teaching Resources

December 11, 2016



Season of Advent

(November 27-December 25)

Psalm 122 – “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

Matthew 3:1-12 – “Starving for Hope”

Matthew 11:2-11 – “The Real McCoy”

Matthew 1:18-25 – “The Invisible Man”

Season of Christmas

(December 25 – January 1)

Titus 3:4-7 – “Why Christmas Matters”

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The Real McCoy

Matthew 11:2-11

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, 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

textual information and definitions to help with your understanding of the passage to assist with your teaching

John in prison—Matthew reported of John’s imprisonment in Matthew 4:12, but tells the complete story in Matthew 14:1-5. Make sure to read about John’s imprisonment, both from our lesson writer and from those passages.

Messiah—simply means, “anointed one,” and is found in both the Old and New Testaments.

John’s disciples—John ministered around the same time as Jesus. As he taught, preached, and baptized, others began to follow him, much like others followed Jesus. They wanted to learn more about what he had to say about God and the one that was to come. John’s disciples were his closest followers and spoke for him when he could not—like when he was in prison.

Prophet—a prophet was an individual who had been sensitized by the voice and the spirit of God who proclaimed God’s word in their specific situation. John proclaimed powerful words and images about the one who was to follow him and through his proclamation, prepared the way for Jesus.

Verse 10—This Old Testament reference comes from Malachi 3:1. The actual quote (from the NRSV) is, “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” The messenger will prepare for the day of the Lord’s coming. John, Jesus claimed, was the one who prepared the way for him.

Opening

How well do you know each other in your group? You might have a good relationship with each other, but you might not know each other very well. Play this fun game to open the lesson about knowing each other better.

Which is True about Me?

Give each person two index cards and a pen. On one card, ask each person to write down something true about themselves that the rest of the group might not know. For example, if you played in the high school band and marched in the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade—that would be a great "truth" to write down.

On the other card, write down a lie about you that people might think could be true about you. For example, if you played in the high school band but never marched in the Macy's Thanksgiving parade, write down, "In high school, I marched in the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade."

After everyone has one Truth and one Lie, go around the room and ask each person to read both of their statements. The goal of the rest of the group is to guess the true statement. Hopefully this game will lead to much laughter and a better understanding of each person in the group. And, it might reveal something about each other that the group did not know before.

Reading the Bible

In today's scripture, we have the story of John wanting to know if Jesus was the Messiah. John had proclaimed that one "greater than he" was to come. John knew it was Jesus and prepared the way for him. However, Jesus didn't fulfill John's idea of what a messiah should be or do. John was ready for Jesus to be a powerful messianic figure who would confront the Romans and make his presence known in a physical, judgmental way. Jesus was different.

While in prison, John learns the truth about Jesus and God's idea of the Messiah. Ask someone to read today's passage, Matthew 11:2-11, and then ask these questions for a basic understanding of the story.

Why was John in prison? Do you think his imprisonment was justified? How was his imprisonment significant for the larger story?

What was Jesus doing that John heard about? Why did that prompt his question to Jesus? What did John expect from Jesus?

How did John and Jesus talk to each other while John was in prison? Even though it might not have been the most efficient method, what made it work?

What was John's question? Why do you think John asked the question, since he knew who Jesus was?

Reading the Bible *continued*

What was Jesus' response? Is this the responses John expected? Why do you say that?

What did Jesus tell the crowds? Why did he say what he did? How do you think the crowds understood John after Jesus' explanation?

What did Jesus say about John in verse 11?

Making Connections

When you think of the word "messiah" what images come to mind? Where did you formulate those ideas?

How did you describe Jesus to someone when you were younger? How do you describe Jesus to someone today? Has your understanding and description of Jesus changed? How? Why?

What do you think people today expect from Jesus? Why do you think that? What do you think people today need from Jesus? Why do you think that?

Who would you say is a modern-day prophet or prophetess? What have they done or said that would lead you to that conclusion? How would you describe that person to someone else?

Our lesson writer states that "John's problem wasn't with Jesus or his actions, but with his perception of Jesus' mission. Do you have any problems with Jesus? What are they? What is your perception of Jesus?"

So What?

John had a certain expectation of what Jesus would be like, but Jesus was actually something very different. How do you think that affected John's understanding of God and his faith?

How often do we have certain ideas about the way something in religious life/church/faith should be, and then we experience something completely different? What affect does that have on your faith?

How much do we try to make God conform to our image and fit into our descriptions? How much do you really, truly, trust and let God be God?

As a large group, make a list of all the ways from scripture you can point to Jesus as the Messiah. What did Jesus do that is an example or witness of bringing hope and joy to the world? Then, make a list of all the ways from your own experiences where Jesus brought hope and joy to the world, and to you specifically. Discuss the similarities. Discuss the differences. What does each list reveal about the way Jesus relates to us?

What words of hope and comfort would you share with someone who expected one thing from God, but got something different? What would you say about God? What would you say about our expectations?

So What? *continued*

Our lesson writer explains that John, in Jesus' reference to "the least in the kingdom," is at the juncture between the old and new age of the kingdom. It could be argued that church and the Christian culture are currently at another juncture. What role will you play as Christ's disciple? How will Jesus' arrival this Advent season push you forward to proclaim the Messiah?

The Challenge

As people of faith, especially during this season of Advent, we are aware of the coming of the Christ. The stores have been decorated for a long time. The advertisements for gifts have been in front of us since Halloween. But, we know something bigger than opening presents is happening.

John proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. He prepared the way for Jesus. His message wasn't easy, and from today's lesson, we learned that what he thought he was proclaiming, was different than the actual incarnation of the Messiah.

This week, you will have conversations and interactions with others who need a messiah. Who are those individuals? What can you say to them to give them a word of hope? When will you do it? How will you let the rest of this group know about your conversation?

Prayer

Close your class with a prayer, thanking God for the coming of Jesus this Advent season and the opportunity we have to share the message of hope and joy. Pray for opportunities and courage for each of the class members this week as they step out on faith to tell someone else about Jesus.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, 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.

A new section—Matthew 11:1 marks a new section in Matthew’s gospel. We know this, in part, because of a structural cue. Matthew’s structure includes five major sections of Jesus’ teachings, each section ending with the phrase “When Jesus had finished . . .” That phrase is found here, as in 7:28, 13:53, 19:1, and 26:1.

The Herod brothers—“Herod” was a family name shared by Herod Antipas and his two brothers, Phillip and Archelaus. Their father, commonly known as Herod the Great, had ruled as king over all of Palestine, but upon his death the Romans divided the territory between the brothers. Archelaus was given control of the southern territories of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. He was such a poor and cruel ruler that his territory was later made into a procuratorship and given over to Pontius Pilate. Antipas was given charge of Galilee (an area west of the Sea of Galilee) and Perea (a larger southern territory east of the Jordan River). Their brother Phillip was entrusted with the northern border territories of Iturea and Tracheonitis, also east of the Jordan.

Worth pondering—Do people in our world see Jesus in different ways? What are some different images of Jesus of which you are aware? Are they all legitimate? Who is Jesus to you?

When our life or religious experience does not live up to our expectations, is it okay to have doubts and ask questions of God?

Luke’s version—The gospel of Luke includes a parallel account of John’s question and Jesus’ response (Luke 7:18-23). It is slightly longer, because Matthew tends to abbreviate, while Luke includes a fuller account, with added detail about John’s interaction with his disciples and their conversation with Jesus (vv. 18-20), and an editorial note before Jesus’ response: “Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind” (v. 21).

This gives added emphasis to Jesus’ response to the messengers: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” (vv. 22-23).

This is one of many parallel texts found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark. They are thought to derive from an early collection of Jesus’ sayings that was known to Matthew and Luke, but not to Mark. Scholars refer to this source as “Q,” from the German word “Quelle,” meaning “source.”

Digging Deeper *continued*

Beatitudes—Jesus’ comment in v. 6: “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense in me” takes the same form as the beatitudes that open the Sermon on the Mount in 5:3-11. Note that it also follows Jesus’ reprise of his ministries to the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, and even the dead – all examples of how “the poor have good news brought to them” in deed as well as in word. The poor can be thought of as both poor in possessions and poor in spirit. It does not bother or offend them that Jesus has not conquered the world and judged the wicked: they accept Jesus for who he is and rejoice in the blessings he has brought to them.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Why was John confused about Jesus as the Messiah?

Donald Hagner, in the Word Biblical Commentary, notes that John's puzzlement is understandable: while John had expected Jesus as Messiah to separate the wheat from the chaff and judge the wicked (3:12), he himself was being held captive by the wicked Herod Antipas, who had yet to be judged. While Jesus proclaimed "liberty to the captives" (Isa. 42:7, 61:1) among the sick and afflicted, John remained a captive in the rustic fortress of Machaerus, in a wilderness area east of the Dead Sea.

John had heard of Jesus' mighty works, but they were not what he had expected, causing him to doubt his earlier sense of certainty that Jesus was the long-awaited "coming one." Thus, he wonders if "another one" was yet to come.

Hagner makes a significant observation for modern believers who can learn from John's confusion:

There is an important lesson to be learned here for those inclined to a triumphalism of an over-realized eschatology. Without question the kingdom brought by Jesus involves the experience of wonderful things, even if one does not experience the more spectacular miracles mentioned in v 5. Nevertheless, for all the joy and fulfillment available to the recipients of the kingdom in the present, there is at the same time the undeniable reality of the continued experience of the effects of evil in this world. When confronted by the latter, it is possible for Christians to "take offense" at Jesus and the nature of the salvation he has brought. If Jesus has brought the kingdom and if Christians have begun to experience eschatological blessings through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is perhaps natural to expect and want the eschaton now. But that is precisely what Jesus does not offer. And thus in the present the disciple of Jesus must be prepared for something less—indeed, for the reality of suffering and death—while even confessing the messianic identity and authority of Jesus (cf Acts 7:55–56), thereby expressing faith in the good news he has announced. John the Baptist was the first person who had to learn this paradox, and since John, the paradox of existence in an era of fulfillment that is nevertheless short of the consummation has had to be learned by the apostles, by the members of Matthew's church, and by each Christian of every generation. (*Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A of Word Biblical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 301-302).

Like John, we may think the coming of Jesus and the inbreaking of the Spirit should bring us a trouble-free life, or the answer to every prayer. John had hoped the Messiah would introduce a new age for the righteous and execute judgment on the wicked at the beginning of his ministry. Sometimes we may wish for the same, but this story is a reminder that such things will take place in God's time, not ours.