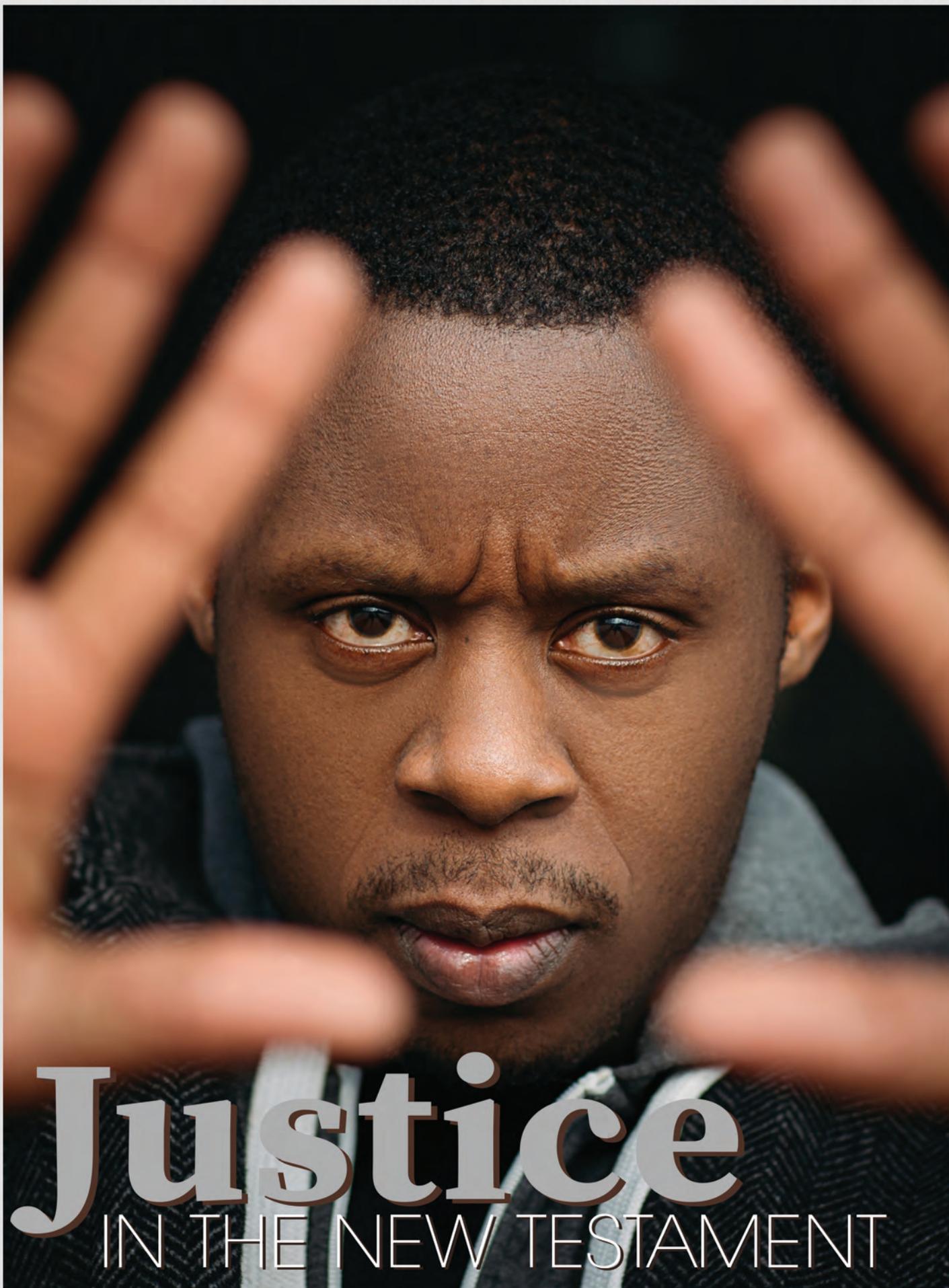


THE IMPROVED ADULT TEACHER SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY



# Justice

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

SUMMER QUARTER 2018 • JUNE, JULY, AUGUST

# **THE IMPROVED ADULT TEACHER SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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# The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary  
as a signal for silence
  - II. Singing
  - III. The Apostles' Creed
  - IV. Prayer, closing with the  
Lord's Prayer in concert
  - V. Singing
  - VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
  - VII. Responsive reading  
of the lesson text by school
  - VIII. The Decalogue
- 

## The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while  
the classes are being arranged
  - II. Class study of the lesson
  - III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
  - IV. Closing bell — silence
- 

## The Closing

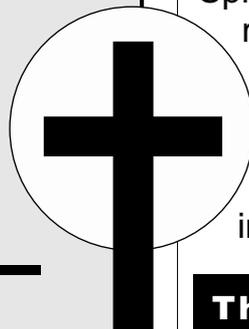
- I. Singing
- II. Review and application  
of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

### Editorial Staff

Rev. Roderick Belin, Publisher  
Rev. Garland F. Pierce, Editor  
Dr. D. Melynda Clarke, Lessons

### The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.



### The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

## JUSTICE AND SABBATH LAWS

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 12:1-14

Focus Scripture: Matthew 12:1-14

*Key Verse: If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless." Matthew 12:7 (NRSV)*

### MATTHEW 12:1-14 (NRSV)

1 At that time Jesus went through the grain-fields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

2 When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath."

3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?

4 He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests.

5 Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless?

6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

7 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

8 For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath."

9 He left that place and entered their synagogue;

10 a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him.

11 He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out?"

12 How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath."

13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your

hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other.

14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

### MATTHEW 12:1-14 (KJV)

1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

10 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the

sabbath days.

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 28 – June 3

<b>Monday</b>	1 Samuel 21:1-6 (David Eats the Bread of Presence)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Hosea 6:1-6 (Lord Desires Mercy Not Sacrifice)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 23:25 (Plucking Grain)
<b>Thursday</b>	Luke 14:1-6 (The Sabbath Is for Merciful Acts)
<b>Friday</b>	John 5:9-18 (The Father and I Are Working)
<b>Saturday</b>	Psalms 10:12-18 (Deliver Justice for the Oppressed)
<b>Sunday</b>	Matthew 12:1-14 (Meet Human Need on the Sabbath)

### VOCABULARY

- **Pharisees** – A Jewish group that rigorously applied the Jewish law to everyday living. Jesus’ major opponents in the gospel of Matthew.
- **Bread of the Presence** – Twelve consecrated loaves set out in the temple and replaced weekly (Lev. 24:5-9).

### INTRODUCTION

In the gospel of Matthew, a series of controversial debates over the law continues to develop between Jesus and the Pharisees. The scripture presented in this lesson presents the argument over working on the Sabbath. The scene opens with the disciples helping themselves to a farmer’s grain because they are hungry. However, the Pharisees see their act of “plucking grain” on the Sabbath day as a violation of the religious law. The Pharisees were a Jewish religious group who fervently applied the law to all aspects of life, regardless of the impact it had on a person’s human condition. Jesus responds to their allegations of wrongdoing by challenging their insensitive belief system that ignores the needs of the weak and vulnerable.

Matthew’s theme throughout this gospel is to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, which is validated through references to prophecies. Jesus presents examples of more serious violations found in Jewish history, such as the taking of the unleavened

ened bread from the house of God by David. Jesus ultimately establishes his authority in this text by proclaiming himself as Lord of the Sabbath.

### **BIBLE STORY**

The gospel of Matthew is believed to have been written after 70 AD. The narratives are primarily set in the hills of Galilee. The writer of this gospel was at one time thought to be the tax collector, Matthew, who Jesus recruited as a disciple. However, the author is likely a member of a later Jewish Christian community that existed decades later. What is clear, however, is the writer's intent to identify Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Savior of the kingdom of Israel. Yet, despite the evidence of Jesus' miracles, the Pharisees opposed Jesus and challenged his authority. Matthew's gospel focuses on the constant debate between Jesus and the religious elite. Matthew provides a justification of Jesus as the Messiah, through a series of Hebrew scriptures that are considered fulfilled prophecies. For instance, Jesus declares John the Baptist as a prophet likened unto Elijah, and the miracles performed by Jesus as evidence of fulfillment of the Savior of Israel (11:2-19). Matthew presents the contrast of a harsh world against Jesus as the compassionate Christ. Je-

sus rebukes the attack on the disciples who have pulled grain on the Sabbath as Jesus submits in verse 8, "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." This gospel is to focus on how the Jewish religious leaders were incorrect in their interpretation of the law. The Pharisee-led Judaism during this time is hypocritical to the true intention of God's law. Jesus brings new light through a liberating theology that attests the true meaning of the law as God's love for his people.

### **LIFE APPLICATION**

What is the meaning of "law" in contemporary terms? What are the consequences of violating the law in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Are the penalties equitable and impartial for all people? Throughout U.S. history, the questions of disparities within our legal systems continue. There is a growing concern over the increased number of African American youth who become statistics of an unbalanced judicial system. In 2014, African Americans constituted 2.3 million, or 34%, of the total 6.8 million correctional population. African Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites. The imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women. Nationwide, African American children represent 32% of children who are arrested,

42% of children who are detained, and 52% of children whose cases are judicially waived to criminal court. Though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately 32% of the U.S. population, they comprised 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015.

There are numerous contributing factors to these statistics. Mandatory minimum sentencing, especially disparities in sentencing for crack and powder cocaine possession, have led to higher rates of incarceration of young blacks. Without restitution programs, the “Three Strikes”/habitual offender policies have led to mandatory sentencing. Zero Tolerance policies have resulted from perceived problems of school violence, all leading to adverse effects on black children. Approximately 35% of black children in grades 7-12 have been suspended or expelled at some point in their school careers compared to 20% of Hispanics and 15% of whites.

Another factor to consider is that many children throughout the United States rely on their schools for their daily meals. Hunger is a global issue that is prevalent in the U.S. Children are hungry because they live in poverty. And when children don't eat, they can't focus, and they can't learn, which leads to behavioral issues

and poor performance in school.

In addition, spending on prisons and jails has increased at triple the rate of spending on Pre-K-12 public education in the last thirty years. Bottom line: prisons have now become big business. Although government leadership speaks about the need to fund education, more funding is targeted for defense, law enforcement, and the penal systems.

In the gospel of Matthew, the Pharisees question the lawfulness of Jesus' disciples “plucking heads of grain” on the Sabbath day (vs. 1-2). Their hunger drove them to fulfill the obvious physical need of hunger, yet the Pharisees condemned their behavior as unlawful. Later, when Jesus entered the synagogue, he faced the same scrutiny as when he healed a man's deformed hand on the Sabbath. Jesus questions whether they would act any differently in regard to attending to their livestock, which may fall in a pit. The value of people should outweigh the values of property. In today's society, tremendous resources are expended to protect property yet a fraction is set aside for human needs. The question can also be raised as to whether the church has also become blind to the mission instituted by Christ to help those in need. When Jesus enters the

synagogue to teach, he also took time to heal the sick (v. 13). The church must be mindful to avoid being restricted to rituals and overlook or even disregard the more important matters, which are to meet the needs of those less fortunate.

### SUMMARY

The scripture from this lesson suggests that traditions and beliefs can become distorted. Fixating on literal meaning while ignoring underlying issues facing humanity are indicators of one's disconnection from God's intention for mercy rather than sacrifice. The question posed is whether the church as well as social entities have allowed fixed habits, rules, and practices to obscure the underlying needs of the people it is designed to serve. Jesus challenges literal interpretations and views by forcing believers to seek a deeper understanding of biblical texts to ensure attaining the intended purpose. It is an exercise towards developing a deeper spiritual awakening in God's divine plan for all of our lives.

### QUESTIONS

1. What similarities and/or comparisons can be seen between the Pharisees' perceptions of Jesus' disciples and society's perception of criminal behavior? What are the deeper causes of inappropriate and even illegal behaviors of both groups discussed above?
2. What can the African Methodist Episcopal Church do to address the human needs that may lead children towards destructive behaviors in school, and further lead to suspensions, and criminal behavior — this legalistic perspective of youth crime and the growing pipeline to prison trend in our society?
3. What are some ideas where the church might replace current rituals with more appropriate and relevant activities of service, to meet the immediate needs of people suffering in our communities?

### CLOSING DEVOTION

End the lesson with participatory prayers. Participants are invited to volunteer to pray specifically for one of the following issues or others they have identified.

- African Americans' disproportionate rates of incarceration
- A revival of social consciousness to speak up for the guiltless, and challenge the accuser.

- Self-examination of potential hypocrisy in the church.
- Increase our compassion for all people.
- Additional issues you feel are relevant, such as specific family members, friends, and schools in your community.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Creator God, holy and awesome, we acknowledge our need of you; and, we are thankful for: the values you induce, the wholesome virtues you instill; the good deeds through us you provoke; the beauty you inspire; and the constancy to progress you impel. We are grateful for the mystery of life, the inspiration of faith

and family.

Thus, we turn to you for the sake of our children...

Teach us that we might teach our young the deep truths of the ages, and the eternal values our children can return to when they have children of their own: love, honesty, decency, respect, hope, charity, and faith. Help us to pass on to our own children, those of our homes and of our communities, that life without you leaves out too much. AMEN.

Excerpts from “*A Prayer for Children and the Vulnerable*”, Let the Church Say Amen! Liturgy, Litany, and Homily, 2011; pg. 17; by Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson, Jr.

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## PARABLES OF GOD'S JUST KINGDOM

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Lesson Scripture: Matthew 13:24-43

Focus Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30

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*Key Verse: "Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." Matthew 13:30 (NRSV)*

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### MATTHEW 13:24-30 (NRSV)

24 He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;

25 but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

27 And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?'

28 He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'

29 But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

30 Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

### MATTHEW 13:24-30 (KJV)

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares.

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 4 – June 10

<b>Monday</b>	Psalm 78:1-8 (Rehearse the Deeds of the Lord)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Ezekiel 17:22-24 (God's Tree of Justice for All)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Matthew 16:13-20 (Jesus Affirmed as Son of Man)
<b>Thursday</b>	Matthew 13:54-58 (Jesus Not Believed in Hometown)
<b>Friday</b>	Luke 18:1-8 (Will Son of Man Find Faith?)
<b>Saturday</b>	Matthew 13:34-43 (Jesus Explains Parable of the Weeds)
<b>Sunday</b>	Matthew 13:24-30 (Defer Judgment Until the Final Day)

## VOCABULARY

- **Parable** – A simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the gospels; allegory.
- **Yeast** – A microscopic fungus consisting of single oval cells that reproduce by budding, and are capable of converting sugar into alcohol; found widely in nature and used in making some of our favorite foods

## INTRODUCTION

In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of

Matthew, we find Jesus teaching through a series of parables. Each parable provides an interpretation of the coming of the kingdom of God. The first parable, the parable of the sower, illustrates how seeds are sown and cultivated in different environments, each with its own challenges or opportunities. In the case of this parable, Jesus shows the comparison of a seed planted in rocky soil: it does not take root. In blistering sun it soon dies, and among thorns the seed is choked. It is only when the seeds are planted in good soil that they thrive and grow. As such, Jesus explains to the disciples that humanity will receive the word of God in much the same way. Unless the seeds are placed in good soil where they can thrive, even with harsh conditions and predators, the seeds will not thrive or produce fruit. And so, the conditions of life can also limit the potential for people to receive the word of God and live continuously under God's teaching.

The second parable, which is the focus of this lesson, illustrates how even in good conditions, weeds can begin to grow among the good plants. The good seeds that thrive and are fruitful represent the people who follow Christ. The weeds are those people who object to Jesus' teachings and God's will. The is-

sue presented is how to cultivate and harvest the good growth while preventing the crop's contamination by the weeds. Jesus continues teaching with a variation of this concept using yeast applied to dough. It is clear in this parable, that once they are placed together, the yeast changes the dough. Jesus uses this illustration to show a contrast with a positive influence occurring with the leavening of the dough, which represents a positive change occurring.

Going further into the chapter, Jesus later presents an illustration of the mustard seed. Rather than looking at the things that can damage the seed, Jesus reveals the power within this tiny seed. It is the mustard seed that grows to be the largest of all plants, providing shade and a home for the birds. This connotes that the mustards seed represents the people and things that may appear small and insignificant. Yet, God has created these creatures to provide the greatest benefit. It is the ability to see that the mustard seed can represent the man, woman, boy, or girl who others may judge and consider unimportant and inconsequential. Yet God creates great things in small packages.

### **BIBLE STORY**

Matthew's gospel Jesus presents a

series of parables that are used to be a reminder of God's justice and the consequences for disobedience. As presented in Psalm 78, the people are warned that prophetic warnings and instructional reminders will come through parables (Psalm 78:1-2). This psalm contains a historical reminder that God requires obedience. The psalm, appropriately titled *Maschil*, which means instruction, demands the people follow the laws of God, avoiding the mistakes of prior generations. Jesus continues this instruction by illustrating God's ability to distinguish the good growth from the weeds that attempt to tarnish and choke the harvest field. Eight parables are presented in this section of Matthew, each used to reveal the methods of planting the gospel and building God's kingdom. In each story, the writer illustrates that the gospel acts similarly to seeds. A seed's growth depends on the type of plant it will become and the environment in which it will grow. However, God will ultimately determine the fate of everything planted at the final harvest.

The parable of the weeds is an illustration of how the people of God will continue to exist among unbelievers who live a worldly lifestyle. Weeds in particular have a characteristic of being wild and

untamed. Weeds are also considered a threat to other plants that are intentionally planted by farmers. They encroach on the areas that are intended for the vegetation to grow. That can also be said of the untamed and wild areas of our society. As Jesus points to the need to address the weeds, he illustrates in this particular parable that it is not a matter of judgment by man. Instead, there will come a time when the harvest will take place and God will separate those God wishes to bring with him, leaving others to perish.

If we look further, however, in Jesus' teaching, he presents a new illustration using the yeast and unleavened dough. In this case, the yeast has become part of the dough. The character of the yeast is to change everything it touches, allowing all of the exposed product to rise. It can be said that Jesus' illustration of the yeast and unleavened dough is also a figurative illustration of humanity, and the effects of God's Spirit in our lives. It may appear that people are doomed to stay in the state they are in, with maladaptive and dysfunctional behavior, disruptive ideas, and a lack of love and caring in their hearts. Some conditions in this world frequently lead people to believe humanity is a lost cause. However, it is clear that Jesus came for the lost. Like

the yeast, which changes the composition and chemistry of the dough, the Holy Spirit can alter and transform the areas of our heart.

### LIFE APPLICATION

We all too often see the negative characteristics of people in our society. Our humanity becomes apparent in daily media reports of crime, corruption, and the calamities of life. Yet we are not always correct in how we assess behavior, which leads to how we judge people. Ultimately, a person's rights and privileges are determined by how society assesses their behavior and predicts their ability to succeed. Consequently, the outcome leads to the negative future of our youth, lowering the inner city child's chances of earning a high school diploma, entering college, obtaining a successful career and productive life. In some cases, the assessment of who is good and bad occurs with children at the earliest stages of development. A research study conducted by Kaiser Permanente and the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) studied 75,000 children for their exposure to adverse traumatic experiences. This included domestic violence, child neglect, child physical and sexual abuse, and other forms of violence. The study determined that the more adverse child experiences

(ACE) an adult had as a child, the more frequently they also reported complaints of problematic psychological, emotional and physical conditions as an adult. In addition, the higher their ACE score, the more likely they also became involved in relationships that duplicated their childhood experiences.

In today's world, the adults with high ACE scores would be considered the weeds of our society. They will likely have dependencies or addictions, have disruptive behavior, poor learning skills, inability to maintain relationships and engage in high-risk behavior. Their conditions are likely a response to circumstances out of their control as a child. Therefore, to assume that "bad" people are lost is contrary to God's justice. Only God knows the history that an individual has experienced. Only God knows what the future may hold for each individual. The ACE studies later proved that kids, who performed poorly in school due to the problems at home, were able to improve once their environment changed. Providing love, support, encouragement, proper nutrition and resources changed the troubled child's behavior and led to successful outcomes.

### SUMMARY

The parable of the harvest reminds

us that it is God who ultimately will judge us all. Our human instinct suggests to us that we want to be in an environment that is free of weeds and tares. But this parable reminds us that in some cases we are entangled with one another. Only God can separate the underlying sins of our society that trap us, revealing the real issues that need to be removed and leaving hearts open to receive the love that is needed for healing and restoration.

1. Consider someone you know that has struggled throughout life and has been labeled as a "bad" person or troublemaker. Examine each of Jesus' parables regarding seeds, and discuss how faith in God's justice can ultimately lead to a better outcome.
2. Brainstorm ways individuals or a ministry group can be vessel(s) for God's justice in a positive way.
3. Discuss how the church has been influenced by problems in the community. Discuss what the church can do to influence the community in a positive way.

### CLOSING DEVOTION

Read Psalm 78.

**Prayer:**

God of heaven and earth, creator of all things new, we beseech you today to look upon these your children as small seeds and sprouts of our spiritual lives. Nurture and guide us, Lord, so that we will fight the influences of this world. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we can constantly rise to the image of Christ. We seek to

be the citizens of your eternal kingdom, and we pray that all will be purged of our vanity, selfishness and prejudice. May we remember that it is not for us to judge, but to forgive, love, and offer Christ. We lift this prayer in the name of our Savior Jesus the Christ, AMEN.