

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Review what we've learned about parables and Kingdom of God from previous two lessons, including the distinction between "Kingdom of God" and "Heaven"
- Define the question that the parable seems to be addressing, which is: *If the kingdom of God is a big deal and celebration, why doesn't everyone participate in it?*
- Highlight the answer that the parable gives: "People get distracted by other things and then they forget or lose track of what is required of them to participate."

Materials needed

- Video clip from "Hoodwinked" (can be seen on rfour.org)
- Electronics that show the video clip
- <http://projects.nytimes.com/interactive/sports/worldcup/spot-the-ball/2014/06/17> -- if this link doesn't work, this game was played in British newspapers quite often in the 70s and 80s – called "spot the ball" or "find the ball" – it's quite popular on the internet – plenty of pictures to google for if need be. NYTimes seems to implement it the best for now. BEWARE, though: The site tracks cookies – so once you do a page, you can't undo it (unless you erase your cookies) – so only practice on one or two pages so that you get a good feel for it
- Laptop and internet connection to do the spot the ball activity (Note: The day I did this lesson the internet was out at our church building, so we improvised and used smart phones. Most the kids had them, so we huddled in groups of twos and threes. Wasn't what I had planned on, but if you don't have an internet connection, I have personal experience that says using smart phones is a feasible backup plan)

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today's class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we'll go around the circle.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here's this week's question:* What is something that is easy for you to pay attention to?

INTRO / Transition to VIDEO

- Today's class is the last one in our session of "Kingdom of God" parables.
- Here's what we've learned so far about parables and the Kingdom of God
 - About the Kingdom of God
 - It is not a place, but a way of life. Wherever we let God be king, that is where the Kingdom of God is.
 - We mentioned that when Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, **he is not talking about heaven or a place we go to when we die**. He's talking about a way of life that is available to us right here, right now
 - Note: This doesn't mean there isn't a heaven – instead, what this means is that "heaven" and "kingdom of God" are two different and separate concepts.
 - About parables
 - Jesus told parables to avoid people's "set in their ways of thinking about God" frame of mind
 - In the first class, there were parables about buying a field with buried treasure in it and buying a great pearl.
 - We talked about how the Kingdom of God was expensive BUT you were also buying a more valuable thing (buying dollar bills with quarters, etc).
 - In other words, to give all of yourself, including all of your possessions to "purchase" the Kingdom of God would give you a net increase in value.
 - In the second class, we saw that the Kingdom of God was like a great feast – it was a big ol' party!
 - We saw that everyone was invited (though, not all at the same time) and there was room for everyone! In other words, God is a fantastic host!
 - However, we also saw that not everyone wanted to attend the party – mostly because they were too busy with their own activities.
- Today's parable will be similar to last week's, but it will also have some ideas about preparation and paying attention.
- To help us think about paying attention and preparing, let's start with the following movie clip
- The clip is from "Hoodwinked" – you might remember a previous clip earlier in the year from this movie where the wolf and the squirrel (called "Twitchy") set dynamite on fire (remember, "deen-ah-meet-a, must be Italian!") and then blew up the railroad track.
- That blown up railroad track will make an appearance in today's video clip. Keep an eye out for it.
- While you are looking for the blown-up railroad track, listen to what the goat is singing about and how it relates to his exchangeable horns.

WATCH VIDEO CLIP

ASK

- So what was the goat singing about? (being prepared)
- What different things did he use to be prepared with? (different horns)
- At the end of the clip, what kind of horn was he using? (a helicopter horn)
- And why did he have to use his helicopter horns? (because the track had been blown up by Wolf and Twitchy earlier in the movie – in the clip we saw earlier in the year)
- What would have happened to the singing goat if he had NOT been prepared (he would have had a rough landing)

TRANSITION TO SCRIPTURE

- In a moment, we're going to read a story, a parable, that Jesus tells about being prepared.
- But first, I'm going to share some background with you regarding how weddings worked at that time.
 - The custom at that time did not include a wedding ceremony like we have now.
 - Instead, the groom would go to the bride's parent's house.
 - Together, they would return to the groom's house where all the guests would be waiting for the couple.
 - Since there were no street lights, the main duty of the bridesmaids (which was considered a great honor) was to light the way of the bridal party to the celebrations with lamps during the evening/night.
 - This meant that the bridesmaids would wait along the path between the bride's and groom's houses and after the groom and bride passed by, the bridesmaids would follow along, making a larger and larger parade of light as they approached the groom's home.
 - Upon arriving to the groom's home, a long celebration would commence (sometimes as long as a whole week).
 - Because a wedding was a big deal, the amount of time spent at the bride's house was indeterminate, meaning, the bridesmaids did not know when to expect the bride and groom to appear. This was a well-known tradition, just like buying, wrapping and giving gifts on birthdays is a well-known tradition for us.

READ Matthew 25:1-13 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers*)

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." 9 But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." 12 But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

ASK

- How many bridesmaids are there? (10)
- How many are wise and how many are foolish? (5 each)
- What determined whether they were wise or foolish? (those who took extra oil were wise)
- Verse 5 - Was the bridegroom on-time? (Nope, dude took his time)
- Because the bridegroom was late, what happened to the oil in the lamps? (it was used / burned up)
- So why did having extra oil turn out to be wise? (The ones with extra oil didn't have to leave to go get more)
- While the five foolish bridesmaids were getting extra oil, what occurrence took place while they were gone? (the bridegroom arrived and the party began)
- Were the late-to-the-party bridesmaids allowed to join the party after it started? (nope)
- What do you think about this -- do you think the 5 foolish bridesmaids should've been allowed to rejoin the party? Why/why not?
- Do you feel bad for the foolish bridesmaids? Why or why not?
- Remember, this was an honor and was a well-known tradition, just like, again, buying and wrapping presents for someone's birthday. So what are some possible reasons you can think of that might explain why the 5 bridesmaids

didn't bring extra oil? (possible reasons: Were distracted, didn't really care about the honor that was offered to them, were careless, forgot)

TELL

- There are a number of ways to think about this story.
- Two common ways are:
 1. Jesus is coming back to earth, but we don't know when. Therefore, be prepared for his arrival.
 2. You have to follow Jesus to get into heaven.
- However, this story isn't about heaven.
- As discussed in the previous class and earlier today, the kingdom of God is a way of living (right here, right now) that invites God to be king/ruler/authority in our life – **in other words, the kingdom of God is different than heaven** (i.e. the kingdom of God is NOT a place that you go to when you die).
 - To make things REALLY COMPLICATED, the author of Matthew uses the term “Kingdom of Heaven” (verse 1) instead of “Kingdom of God” – which certainly makes the “Kingdom of God” and heaven seem like the same thing.
 - Why the author of Matthew does this is because the author is being a good Jew – he's avoiding using the word “God” whenever possible by substituting the word “God” with the word of “heaven.” This is very similar to people who say “Oh my goodness” or “Oh my gosh” instead of “Oh my God.” Maybe you know someone who does this? Maybe your grandmother? Except the author of Matthew chose to associate “God” with a place of where we think God is instead of a word that sounds similar to “God” but isn't “God” (like “gosh”).
 - FOOTNOTE (this is more for the teachers than the students): How do we know that the author of Matthew is simply making a discretionary word choice? Mostly because of Mark and Luke. Matthew, Mark, and Luke share many of the same stories, sometimes verbatim. In a number of these shared verbatim passages, there will be only one difference – Matthew uses the term “Kingdom of Heaven” instead of “Kingdom of God.” Furthermore, Luke, Mark, and John never use the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” – which means it is much more likely that Matthew was making a word choice decision, rather than introducing a concept that the other three gospel authors knew nothing about even when they were talking about the same stories that Matthew does.
- So, you might be wondering, then, why does Jesus tell this story?
- One reason seems to be to help people think about a type of reason for why some miss out on the party that is the Kingdom of God.
- In the last parable we read, we got to hear one type of reason why some might not participate in the Kingdom of God way of life: Because they were too busy living their own way of life.
- Today's parable highlights another type of reason: Because some won't pay attention to it, which would then leave them ill-equipped and unprepared to participate in the Kingdom of God way of life.
 - In other words, if they were the goat from the movie clip, they'd experience a hard landing.
- Which brings us to the end of the parables from the last class and this class. Both parables end in a way that makes it sound like the people will be punished/left out because the owner/bridegroom don't want anything to do with the busy/foolish people. But what both stories are really pointing to are how the people have made their own decisions that then kept them from participating.
- Here's what I don't want you to think: I don't want you to hear these stories and think that you only have one chance to participate in the kingdom of God and if you miss that chance then you're shut out.

- Because that's just not true.
- At any point, you can say, "You know what, I'd like to learn how to live God's way – so I'm going to really start paying attention to what Jesus has been saying and teaching about how to better do that."
- At that point, what will happen is that you will start paying attention, learning, and then making decisions based on what Jesus teaches about God.
- I will say, though, that the earlier you start, the easier it is to follow through with your decision.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- A similar way to think about this parable would be to pretend that Jesus was the ball in a sporting event.
- We could then summarize the bridesmaids parable by saying "the foolish bridesmaids didn't keep their eye on the ball."
- To help us think about how keeping our eye on the ball isn't as easy as it sounds, and that it requires some practice, let's do the following activity.

EXPLAIN Activity

- It's pretty simply, really. We go to this webpage -- <http://projects.nytimes.com/interactive/sports/worldcup/spot-the-ball/2014/06/17> -- and then we decide as a class where we think the soccer ball is going to be.
- One of the teachers clicks where we agreed as a class where the ball "should" be and then we'll find out how close our guess was.

DO Activity

TELL

- When we choose to pay attention to a certain thing, we tend to do better and get better at it.
- The same is true with following Jesus and choosing to live the Kingdom of God way of life that Jesus teaches about.
- If we choose to pay attention to Jesus, if we keep our eye on the ball (so to speak), then we'll be well-prepared to be able to do things like Jesus did – a.k.a. live the Kingdom of God way of life.

CLOSING PRAYER