

KINGDOM.

LESSON 31

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God’s kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> PROVERBS 15, 16, 17 and 19
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Take turns and **share (or read)** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your personal times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Proverbs 15, 16, 17 and 19). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSES IN ROMANS]</i> (11) ROMANS 8:1
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Review two by two.

(11) Romans 8:1. Therefore, there is now no condemnation (doom) for those who are in Christ Jesus.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[THE PARABLES OF JESUS]</i> THE DOCTOR AND THE SICK and THE SALT OF THE EARTH AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD
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**“The parable of the doctor and the sick” in Matthew 9:9-13
and “the parable of the salt of the earth and the light of the world” in Matthew 5:13-16 are parables about
WITNESSING IN GOD’S KINGDOM.**

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

A. THE PARABLE OF THE DOCTOR AND THE SICK

Read Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17 and Luke 5:27-32.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

This is a parable in the form of a statement. Doctors meet with people who are sick in order to heal them. Healthy people usually do not go to the doctor.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Matthew 9:9-11.

A certain tax collector, named Levi or Matthew, had his booth or customhouse in the vicinity of the seashore in Capernaum (Mark 2:13). His task was to collect taxes on all the goods, which passed along that international highway between Syria and Egypt. He lived in Capernaum, the very place, which Jesus had chosen as his headquarters (Matthew

4:12-16). Before this present event, he must have had frequent contacts with Jesus Christ and had already surrendered his heart to Jesus and his cause. When Jesus called him to follow him as a disciple, he made a clean break with his occupational past and became one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ.

Luke records that Matthew held a great banquet for Jesus at his house. A large crowd of tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. Tax collectors did not pay much attention to the rules and regulations, which the Pharisees and the teachers of the law superimposed on God's law. Besides this, the tax collectors and their friends disregarded and even grossly violated God's law. Moreover, they were notorious for being dishonest, greedy and unpatriotic towards Israel. Jews generally regarded them as traitors and especially the Pharisees despised them.

The Pharisees saw Jesus and his disciples eating with these tax collectors and sinners. Probably when the banquet was over and the people were leaving, they criticised Jesus in front of his disciples. They vented their bitterness upon the disciples who had chosen such a person to be their teacher. Jesus had heard the criticism of the Pharisees and had observed the resulting embarrassment of his disciples. So he told them the parable of the doctor and the sick.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Matthew 9:12.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is contained in Matthew 9:13.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Teach. Jesus does not explain any of the details. However, from the parable in the form of a statement it is evident that *the healthy*, *the sick* and *the doctor* are relevant details. Usually, not the healthy, but the sick people go to a doctor in the hope to receive healing. "The healthy people" represent the Pharisees, "the sick people" represent the tax collectors and sinners, and "the doctor" represents Jesus Christ.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. *A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make.* Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the doctor and the sick in Matthew 9:9-13 teaches about "witnessing in God's kingdom".

The main message of this parable is the following. "There are times and occasions when it is entirely proper and justified to fellowship with despised people, especially when the purpose is to meet their needs."

Witnessing is one of the fundamental characteristics of God's kingdom. The genuine people of God's kingdom go out and associate with all kinds of people-groups in the world, no matter their social background, social standing or development, in order to bring healing and salvation to them.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parable teaches?

Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Matthew 5:6. Jesus teaches that Christians should hunger and thirst for righteousness. That is, they should come up for the rights of the weak and those who have no voice in society: the orphans, the widows and the aliens, who may be economic migrants, political refugees or religious refugees and who are often illegal immigrants.

Matthew 11:28-30. Give yourself to those people who are burdened with worries, cares, problems, anxieties and fears. Many people need someone who is willing to listen to them, take them serious and accept them. Many people are lonely and need someone to relate to.

Matthew 22:9-10. Go to the people living in your street and to people who hang around at street corners. Many young people are bored and have no goal to give their lives to. Invite everyone you can find to Jesus Christ and to his kingdom, whether they "good" or "bad" in the eyes of other people.

Luke 14:21-23. Go into the streets of your town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Often the people at the bottom or sidelines of society are most willing to respond to the invitation of Jesus Christ.

Luke 15:4,8,24. Go after the lost sheep until you find it. They may represent former believers that have strayed away. Bring people to repent from their sins and evil life-styles and to return to God and his people.

Luke 19:10. Go, seek and save those who are lost in every sense of the word.

John 7:37-38. Invite those who are thirsty for a personal relationship with God, for the reality of God living in them through his Holy Spirit and for being a person who has streams of living water flowing from them that brings transformation all around them.

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of this parable? What does Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what does he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) Jesus and his disciples had fellowship with despised people.

Jesus was associating on intimate terms with people of low reputation, not as a glutton or drunkard or comrade in evil, but as a doctor. Without in any way becoming contaminated with the sins (diseases) of his patients, he *must* get very close to them in order that he may heal them! As a true doctor, he did his duty!

(2) The Pharisees avoided despised people.

They imagined themselves to be righteous in God's eyes. They regarded themselves as "healthy" and despised "the sick" (all other people) (Luke 18:9; John 7:49). Because they regarded contact with tax collectors and sinners as "contaminating" their religious purity, they avoided them.

On the basis of their own reasoning, Jesus condemned the attitude of the Pharisees and justified his own conduct. If the Pharisees regarded the tax collectors and sinners as being "sick", why did they not heal them? Jesus answered the criticism of the Pharisees by pointing out to them that they were neglecting their duty. They were not showing any kindness or help to these despised people.

(3) God desires mercy towards despised people.

Jesus challenged the Pharisees to go and learn the meaning of God's words, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Jesus quoted this verse from Hosea 6:6. Israel in the time of Hosea (754-714 B.C.) was unfaithful to God, broke God's covenant, rebelled against God's covenant, rejected the good, did things without God's consent or approval and made idols to its own destruction (Hosea 8:1-4). The people in Israel robbed and murdered, and practised prostitution and deceit (Hosea 6:9 - 7:2). Continuing to bring sacrifices under such conditions amounted to dead ritualism and was detestable to God (Hosea 8:13). The prophet Hosea said that God desired mercy, that is, holding on to the covenant with God and love towards the neighbour. Here in Matthew 9:13, the emphasis is on mercy and kindness towards tax collectors and sinners.

(4) Jesus has come, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

The words *call to repentance* in Luke 5:32 are implied in the word *calling* in Matthew and Mark. Sinners are called (invited) to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. In so far this calling is extended in the preaching of the gospel, it is not always effectual (Matthew 22:14), but in so far this calling is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people, it is always effectual (Romans 8:30)!

This passage makes it clear that the invitation to salvation was not extended to people who considered themselves to be righteous, even if they were not. The invitation to salvation is extended to people who are in desperate need of salvation! Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the sick, the sinners, the straying, the beggars, the burdened ones, and the hungry and thirsty ones, in short, the lost!

B. THE PARABLES OF THE SALT OF THE EARTH AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Read Matthew 5:13-16.

These two comparisons are actually "metaphors". A metaphor is a comparison between two things that are basically unlike and the comparison is implied. It does not use the word "like" or "as" and therefore one must find the point of comparison from the contents or context. For example, the following are metaphors in the Bible: "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). "The belt of truth, ... the breastplate of righteousness, ... the shield of faith, ... the helmet of salvation, ... the sword of the Spirit, ..." (Ephesians 6:10-17). "Watch out for those dogs" (Philippians 3:2).

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

Salt. Salt has many characteristics: its whiteness, pungency, flavour and preservative power. In this story-illustration, the emphasis probably falls on its antiseptic function and preservative power. Salt is a substance which prevents or retards decay. But its function to impart flavour must not be excluded (Leviticus 2:13; Colossians 4:6).

Salt that has lost its saltiness. The salt, which is obtained from the marshes and lagoons or rocks in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, can easily acquire a stale or alkaline taste, because of its mixture with gypsum (Ezekiel 47:11). Such salt, which has lost its function, is literally good for nothing. People throw it out and it is trampled underfoot.

Light. Light also has many characteristics: its brightness, visibility, colour, and revealing power. In this story-illustration, the emphasis is on its visibility. Light is a substance that reveals good things and dispels darkness.

The light of a city on a hill. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. It is clearly visible to everybody.

The light of a lamp on a lamp-stand. The lamps in the time of Jesus consisted of a flat terra cotta container with a nozzle-shaped extension with a hole for the wick. On its top the lamp had two holes, one for adding oil and the other for air (oxygen). The lamps were placed on a shelf extending from the pillar in the centre of the one room house. This pillar supported the main crossbeam, which supported the flat roof. Or the lamp was placed in a hole in the wall or on some kind of stand. The point is that it was placed in a position where it could give light to everyone in the room.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of these parables is contained in Matthew 5:11-12.

Jesus described the influence of the world on Christians: The evil people in the world often insult and persecute Christians. Now in the parable of the salt of the earth and the light of the world, Jesus described the exact opposite, namely, the influence of Christians on the world! The influence of the kingdom of God on the world is like the functions of salt and light.

(2) The stories of these parables or metaphors are contained in Matthew 5:13-15.

(3) The explanation or application of these parables are contained in the illustrations itself and in Matthew 5:16.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discuss. Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

Salt. Jesus himself made the comparison that the people of God's kingdom are like salt. Salt gives flavour, but specially prevents or retards decay. Therefore this detail is essential.

Light. Jesus also made the comparison that the people of God's kingdom are like light. The light of a city on a hill or the light of a lamp on a stand cannot be hidden. Therefore this detail also has significance.

4. Identify the main lesson of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parables of the salt of the earth and the light of the world in Matthew 5:14-16 teach about "witnessing in God's kingdom".

The main lesson of these parables is the following. "The influence of the people of God's kingdom is (negatively) to combat moral and spiritual decay and (positively) to spread forth the message of salvation together with all its blessings."

Witnessing is one of the fundamental characteristics of God's kingdom. The genuine people of God's kingdom prevent or retard worldly-mindedness or secularisation on the one hand and they oppose aloofness or isolationism from the world on the other hand. They combat the extreme of many modern people, who do not believe in the existence of God and who tend to be involved only in this world with its materialism and pleasure (1 Corinthians 15:32). They also combat the opposite extreme of many people, who do not believe in the importance of creation and who tend to be involved only in religion that has no influence on this world.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parables teach?

Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6; 1 Timothy 4:12. Salt has preservative power and prevents corruption. Christians must not become tasteless in their language or in their behaviour. Salt also has pungency and flavour. Christian speech should have good contents and be thought provoking. It should not repel, but attract and have spiritual charm. Thus, a Christian is known by his speech as well as by his conduct.

Psalms 36:9; 119:105; Matthew 6:22-23; 2 Corinthians 4:6. Light indicates the true knowledge of God. It has its source in God, is revealed through the Bible and through Christ. It is received into the soul through the eyes of the body. What we set our eyes on determines what our whole personality becomes.

John 3:19-21; Ephesians 5:8-14. Light symbolises goodness, righteousness and truthfulness. It symbolises everything that pleases the Lord. It exposes the shameful and secret works of darkness. Christians live a transparent life before the people in the world.

Isaiah 9:1-7; John 1:4; 8:12. The attributes of God are summarised in the word “life” and the revelation of the attributes of God is summarised in the word “light”. Jesus Christ is the Life and the Light. He is God and reveals God’s attributes or character and God’s righteous government visibly to people. His kingdom results in joy and peace. Whoever follows Jesus Christ will also have the light of life, that is, will visibly possess eternal life and also be a visible revelation of the attributes of God.

Psalms 27:1; Luke 1:77-79. “Light” in a comprehensive way includes all the blessings of salvation. This is probably the meaning in Matthew 5:14. Christians reveal the blessings of salvation to the people in the world. They radiate the fact that they are completely forgiven, accepted by God and precious and significant as a person in God’s eyes. They are sure of their salvation and confident of their eternal position in Christ and the value of their task (ministry) in this world.

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of this parable? What does Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what does he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) The people in God’s kingdom are salt.

The people of God’s kingdom, that is, the genuine Christians, have the function of combating moral and spiritual decay. Salt acts secretly. Although we know that it combats decay, we cannot see it perform its task. The presence of Christians among non-Christians often stops them from telling off-colour jokes, speaking profanities, executing wicked plans, bribery, corruption, vandalism, crime, drug abuse, etc. The world is wicked, but only God knows how far more corrupt it would have been without the restraining example, life, and prayers of Christians (Genesis 18:20-32).

(2) What happens to descendants of Christians in God’s kingdom that have lost their saltiness?

The Pharisees and teachers of the law advocated a formal, legalistic religion in the place of the true religion proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets. The result was that the salt had lost its flavour in the religious life of Israel and many “sons of the kingdom”, that is, the unbelieving descendants of the Old Testament believers, would be cast out of God’s kingdom (Matthew 8:12). They were not born-again (John 3:3-8).

Likewise, when people who were trained in the knowledge of the truth (in church, in theological colleges and in Bible Schools, etc. without being born-again), resolutely set themselves against the exhortations of the Holy Spirit and become hardened in their opposition, they cannot be renewed to repentance (Matthew 12:32; Hebrews 6:4-6)¹.

(3) The people in God’s kingdom are light and lamps.

The citizens of God’s kingdom have not only been endowed with light, that is, with all the blessings of salvation, but are also the lamps that spread these blessings of salvation to the people around them in the world. What a lamp is to a house, true Christians are to the world. They let the light of Christ’s salvation and all its blessings shine forth into the world, so that all people may see it and begin to glorify God. Christians do good deeds out of gratitude for the salvation they have received by grace through faith.

The Christians are to be light-possessors and light-transmitters (Philippians 2:15)! However, Christians are never a light in and by themselves. Christ is the real Light of the world (John 8:12) and Christians are only the light of the world, when they remain in Christ and reflect Christ’s light. Christ is like the sun and Christians resemble the moon, reflecting the sun’s light. Apart from Christ, Christians cannot shine (John 15:5).

¹ **Hebrews 6:4-6.** Greek: adunaton ... parapesontas (aorist, active, participle) palin anakainizein eis metanoian (Impossible to restore again to repentance). They seemed to have repented before, because they were “enlightened” (baptised), “tasted (consciously enjoyed the blessings of) the heavenly gift” (the Lord’s Supper), “became sharers in the Holy Spirit” (presumably received the Holy Spirit when apostolic hands were laid on them) (cf. Simon in Acts 8:18-21), tasted the goodness of the Word of God (preaching and teaching) and the powers of the coming age (the mighty works or miracles in the apostolic age). Only the Lord knows who are really his (2 Timothy 2:19) and the fruit is an indication of what has really taken place in the heart (verse 7-8)! The possibility of backsliding is underestimated when you think that the above cannot happen. And it is over-estimated when you think that for sins committed after baptism there can be no repentance.

Therefore it is not the task of the Church to spread its own light, that is, to make pronouncements on every issue in the world. It is her task to spread (reflect) the light of Jesus Christ, that is, to proclaim the message of the kingdom (kingship) of Jesus Christ and his salvation. Remember, “the testimony of Jesus (given by Jesus, about Jesus and about his teachings) is the spirit (essence) of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10)!

C. A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN TEACHINGS OR LESSONS OF THE PARABLES ABOUT WITNESSING IN GOD’S KINGDOM

The parables about WITNESSING IN GOD’S KINGDOM are the following.

- “The parable of the doctor and the sick” in Matthew 9:9-13.
- “The parable of the salt of the earth and the light of the world” in Matthew 5:13-16.
- “The parable of the householder” in Matthew 13:51-52 (See manual 11, supplement 10).
- “The parable of the labourers and the harvest” in Matthew 9:35-38 (See manual 11, supplement 10).

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of the parables about witnessing in God’s kingdom? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) All people, especially the lost, must know what God or Jesus Christ is like.

Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost! That is, the sick, the sinners, the straying, the beggars, the burdened ones, the hungry and the thirsty ones. He associated with the despised, the underprivileged and the harassed people of the world in order to meet their needs for healing and especially salvation.

(2) Christians must know what they should be like.

God wants Christians to be witnesses. These parables teach that we must, like Jesus Christ, associate with the despised, the underprivileged and the harassed people of the world, in order to meet their needs for healing and salvation. Christians must not withdraw from society, but influence the people around them by negatively combating moral and spiritual decay (corruption) and positively by spreading the knowledge and blessings of the gospel. Christians have the responsibility to pass on to other people what they have learned from the Bible and especially from Jesus Christ. Christians must pray that God may send out more and qualified labourers into his harvest in the world. And finally, Christian must train other Christians to become qualified labourers.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD
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Take turns in the group to *pray short* to God in response to what you have learned today. Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. **Preach, teach or study** “the doctor and the sick” and the parable of “the salt of the earth and the light of the world” together with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Proverbs 27, 28, 29 and 31 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** (12) Romans 8:38-39. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. Romans 8:18-39. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. **Update your notebook** on preaching God’s kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.