

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **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. These parables are parables concerning WITNESSING IN GOD'S KINGDOM.

(S) We will first study **THE PARABLE OF THE DOCTOR AND THE SICK**. Please read Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17 and Luke 5:27-32 by yourself, or take turns in the group to read a few verses each. Matthew 9:12 says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

What are the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable? This is a parable in the form of a statement. Every doctor meets with people who are sick in order to heal them. Healthy people usually do not go to the doctor.

(S) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

What is the context of this parable?

The setting of the parable is Matthew 9:9-11. According to Mark 2:13, a certain tax collector, named Levi or Matthew, had his booth or customhouse in the vicinity of the seashore in Capernaum. His task was to collect taxes on all the goods that passed along that international highway between Syria and Egypt. He lived in Capernaum, the very place which Jesus had chosen as his headquarters. 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 followed Jesus.

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.

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

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

(T) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

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

(S) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

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

The main message of the 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 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.

(T) **POINT 5. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or lessons of this parable.

First. 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 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!

(S) Second. The Pharisees avoided despised people. They imagined themselves to be righteous in God's eyes. They trusted in their own righteousness and despised all other people (Lk 18:9; Jn 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 so very 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.

(T) Third. 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, were 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 their own destruction (Hos 8:1-4). They robbed and murdered people, and practised prostitution and deceit (Hos 6:9 - 7:2). Continuing to bring sacrifices under such conditions amounted to dead religious ritualism and was detestable to God (Hos 8:13). Hosea said that God desired mercy, that is, love towards the neighbour and genuine faithful fellowship with the God of the Bible. Here in Matthew 9:13, the emphasis is on kindness, which God wants people to extend towards tax collectors and sinners.

(S) Fourth. Jesus has come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The words "to repentance" in Luke 5:32 are implied in the word "calling" of Matthew and Mark. *The calling* is to invite sinners 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 (Mt 22:14), but in so far this calling is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people, it is always effectual (Rom 8:30).

This passage makes it clear that the invitation to salvation is extended, not to people who consider themselves to be righteous, even if they are not, but 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, the hungry and thirsty ones, in short, the lost people of this world!

(T) Now we will study **THE PARABLES OF THE SALT OF THE EARTH AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.** Please read Matthew 5:13-16 by yourself, or take turns in the group to read a few verses each. Matthew 5:13-16 says, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

(S) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORIES OF THE PARABLES.**

Let us take turns to describe the true-to-life elements of the stories of the parables:

First. 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 that prevents or retards decay. But its function to impart flavour must not be excluded (Lev 2:13; Col 4:6).

Second. Salt that has lost its saltiness. The salt that 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 that has lost its function, is literally good for nothing. People throw it out and it is trampled underfoot.

(T) Third. 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.

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

Fifth. 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. The lamps were placed on a shelf extending from the pillar in the centre of the one room house. This pillar supported the main cross-beam supporting 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.

(S) POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.

What is the context of these parables?

The setting of these parables is Matthew 5:11-12. Jesus described *the influence of the world on Christians*. The evil people in the world often insult and persecute the 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 the Christians on the world!* The influence of God's kingdom on the world is like the functions of salt and light.

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

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

(T) POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.

Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant? Jesus himself made the comparison that the people of God's kingdom are like salt and like light. Therefore both salt and light are essential details. The light of a city on a hill or the light of a lamp on a stand cannot be hidden. These two pictures strengthen the main comparison between Christians and light.

(S) POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.

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

The parable about the salt of the earth and the parable about the light of the world in Matthew 5:14-16 is about *witnessing in God's kingdom*.

The main message of the 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 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 Cor 15:32). They also combat the opposite extreme of many people, who do not believe in the reality of creation and who tend to be involved only in religion that has no influence on this world.

(T) POINT 5. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.

First teaching. The people of 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 in this world. 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 (Gen 18:20-32).

Second teaching. What happens to the people in God's kingdom who lose their saltiness. The Pharisees and teachers of the law advocated a formal religion of laws 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 Jews as sons of the kingdom would be cast out of God's kingdom (Mt 8:12). Likewise, when people who were trained in the knowledge of the truth in the Bible resolutely set themselves against the exhortations of the Holy Spirit and become hardened in their opposition, they cannot be renewed to repentance (Mt 12:32; Heb 6:4-6).

(S) Third teaching. The people of 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 means used by God to transmit 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. Christians 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! (Phil 2:15) However, Christians are never a light in and by themselves. Christ is the real light of the world (Jn 8:12) and Christians are only the light of the world, when they remain in him and reflect his light. Jesus Christ is like the sun and Christians resemble the moon that only reflects the light of the sun. Apart from Jesus Christ Christians cannot shine (Jn 15:5). Therefore it is not the task of the Church to spread *its own light*, that is, to make pronouncements on every philosophical, economic or political issue in the world. It is the task of the Church to spread *the light of Jesus Christ*, that is, to proclaim the message of salvation and to live out the message of Jesus Christ within this dark world.

(T) POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLES.

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or lessons of these parables about witnessing in God's kingdom.

First. 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.

(S) Second. Christians must know what they should be like: God wants Christians to have influence in this world. Christians are Christ's witnesses by word and deed. Like Jesus Christ, we Christians must 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. On the one hand they must combat moral and spiritual decay and on the other hand that must spread forth the message of salvation together with all its blessings by word and deed. Christians have the responsibility to pass on to other people by word and deed what they have learned from Jesus Christ.

(T) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parable of the rash builder and the reckless king. As preparation, please read Luke 14:25-35.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".