



Signposts to the Lost is a weekend which challenges us to focus our lives on God and become for Him vessels which point others to Him. As ever the weekend is structured to allow group time Bible study and presentations with material provided for those who want to go deeper on their own.

The material for this weekend is a selection of the parables of Jesus. TFG ran this weekend at *Annan Court* in January 2000.

Group Time Bible Study Material

These work best with groups of 6 to 10 people, where at least one person is capable of facilitating discussion without dominating the group!

There are two separate parables being studied, half the groups will study one and the other half the other. Allow about an hour for this, though it may be better to have say 20 minutes to read the parables and answer the first few questions about them [who? What? etc] to make sure everyone understands the main points, then to break before answering the questions on the sheets for another half hour.

After this there are various possibilities. One is to put all the people who studied one parable together, and get them to think about what the main thing they got from it was. They can then work on drama, a poem, a picture, or any other means they want to teach the rest of the people on the weekend what it is they learnt. The ways of doing this are endless.... one group we had decided to use a digital camera and make a slide show to retell the story of the parable, whilst at the same time another group turned the whole thing into an *opera!*

The aim is that all involved have fun, because it's vital young people learn that it is possible to have great fun in a Christian context. Beyond that, as they try to teach others what the parable means, the performers gain a deeper level of understanding of the truths contained.

The main talk on the Saturday evening can pick up some of the themes developed by the parables to apply them. The basic aim of the weekend is that we are living our lives as *signposts* to point the way to Jesus for those who don't know Him. In the words of a song out of the old *Youth Praise* book:

they are watching you, marking all you do,
hearing the things you say.

Let them see the Saviour as He shines in you,
let His love control you every day.



As you join your group on Saturday morning you will be looking together into a couple of Jesus' parables. The parables in your group times are:

Salt and Light and the 10 Virgins.

The first of these appears in all of the first three Gospels, whilst the 10 Virgins only appears in Matthew. Choose one of them to begin with, and study it together using the following as a guide. If you have time, then also look at the other one.

Salt & Light

Read all three of the following passages

(don't skimp by reading just one!)

Matthew 5: 13 - 16;

Mark 4: 21 - 25;

Luke 8: 16 - 18 *and* Luke 11: 33 - 36

The Ten Virgins

Read the following passage:

Matthew 25: 1-13

Before going any further you now need to *briefly* answer the following questions (for the parable you are looking at):

- i/ Who is Jesus telling the story to? Are these people believers in Him or not?
- ii/ Are the characters being spoken of in the parable believers or not?
- iii/ What do you think is the main point Jesus is trying to get across here?

Ok, now we are ready for a close examination of the passages. [for the Ten Virgins go to page 4]

Salt & Light

Now we consider bits of the parable in detail. Firstly compare the three passages....are they all reports of the same event, or did Jesus tell this same parable in different places at different times?



What are the *similarities* and what are the *differences* between the accounts?

Salt What is it used for, and what was it used for in those days? It is important to know this as Jesus wants us to have the same use in the world.¹

So, why did Jesus say His followers are the 'salt of the earth'?



What do you think it means to 'lose saltiness'?



Looking at the Church today (your own, or nationally/internationally), would you say it is or isn't *salty* as Jesus wants it to be? Give reasons!

What about you personally.....*are you salty?*

Light Jesus says His followers are the light of the world. What does He mean by this?



Why does He talk about the lamp being hidden under a bowl? What does this mean for Christians?

In the Mark passage verse 25 is similar to something Jesus says at the end of the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14 to 30). Does what you know of that parable help in any way to explain this one?



In the second version of the parable in Luke's gospel Jesus is making a different point. Here He is talking about light coming in as well as shining out. How do we '*see to it then that the light within you is not darkness*' (v 35)?

Lamps in those days of course were not like those of today. There were two types, small oil burners for use indoors (they would blow out outside) and torches (described below in the 10 virgins section). What would happen to either of these types of lamp if put under a bowl?

Finally try to summarise what this parable is saying, and write down on a large flipchart or OHP acetate what you have learnt from it as a group.

¹ Salt has many uses. Its main use in Jesus' day was as a *preservative*. Then and now it also was and is used for *flavouring*.

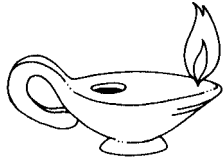
The Ten Virgins



Let's start by thinking about the main characters and who they represent:

- * the *Bridegroom*?
- * the *Virgins* or *Bridesmaids*? [depending on translation]

Obviously the virgins represent pure people....are they all believers in the bridegroom?



The **LAMPS** were most probably torches. Long poles with a burning end. The end would be made of rags, soaked in oil. They would burn for several minutes, then the rag would need to be trimmed and re-soaked. So only those with spare oil would be able to keep them alight all night. What does this represent for us?



What is the job of a bridesmaid?² What or who is the 'Bride of Christ'? How do the *bridesmaids* prepare the *Bride of Christ* for Him?³
Not everyone agrees that the 'virgins' were 'bridesmaids'. But they were certainly there to welcome the groom and to walk with Him into the feast.

Why were all of them asleep? Is Jesus saying something about Christians here before His return?

What was the main difference between the wise and the foolish virgins?



There are many Old Testament references to oil, what was it used for? What do you think the *oil* represents today? (Compare, for instance, Exodus 8:10 - 12 with Acts 10:38 or 1 John 2:20)

What happened to those who 'weren't ready'? What sort of people do you think are represented by these foolish virgins....are they Christians? Do they just think they are?

² Essentially to prepare the Bride for the Groom

³ Are we both the bridesmaids and the Bride?

I can imagine some of the disciples asking Jesus to say more about this, and so He goes on to the next parable (v 14 onwards). How does that help in the understanding of this one?

Finally try to summarise what this parable is saying, and write down what you have learnt as a group from it on a flipchart or OHP acetate.



After Group Work is finished....

All the groups that studied the same parable get together and present their findings (flipcharts/acetates) to each other. Try to agree on the main lessons, but this isn't crucial: it may well be different aspects are important to different people.

Then everyone in the new larger group decides how they want to be involved in presenting the teaching of the parable to the other people on the weekend. Maybe a group will get together to do a drama, or another group might write and perform a song, or some people will do some art work. Allow any form of creativity you have resources for!

The programme will allow time for this to be produced, and then the presentations can be made at some point on Saturday afternoon (normally takes between 60 and 90 minutes).

There isn't time to look at but this material aims to take

More Parables

these on the weekend itself, you beyond the content of

the weekend and give you something to help to continue your studies at home. In the next few pages we look at some other parables which relate to our theme, and I will share some thoughts about them. However, let the Holy Spirit speak to you directly too.

Read the passages and answer similar questions to those above for each one....don't just take my thoughts.

Remember: Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:13,14)

Milk is food that has been digested by someone/thing else and then fed to you; solid food is food that you digest yourself. You grow much stronger if your main diet is solid



food; you become a stronger Christian if your main diet is straight from God's Word. Milk is great for puddings, what other Christians teach you should be your 'afters', not your 'main course'. You could try one of these parables a week.....

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin: Matthew 18: 1 -14 and Luke 15: 1 - 10

In Matthew Jesus is speaking to His disciples, in Luke to the Pharisees. So these are different occasions on which Jesus is telling the story of the sheep. In the Matthew story, Jesus has just been talking about children and says we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless we are 'born again' (3), He then goes on to say that we must become like a child to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus Himself became like a child, and teaches us what it means to do so: to be helpless, relying totally on others. Imagine.....the God Who made the universe humbled Himself to be *totally dependent* on others. He teaches us to do that

He then goes on to underline one of His major points: *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.* (Luke 19:10) by saying how important it is to Him, God, that the lost get returned to His care. Verse 14 gives us God's attitude to the lost.

In the Luke passage He adds the story of the lost coin, and the major point here is of the joy that God has when the lost are found. Note that in both the stories there is nothing that the sheep or the coin can do to get found....they need the owner to do the finding. Is there anything that a person can do to be found (to stop being lost?)

This makes us ask "What can I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Jesus gave the answer *repent* (verse 7). The Apostles answered "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.*" (Acts 16:31). So there is a two way process. God is looking for His lost sheep, but we are not dumb animals....when we are found by Him our response has to be repentance and belief.

What should we do for the lost?

It depends on them!

If someone is lost and they know it, they will ask for directions. All we have to do then is guide them home.

If they *don't* realise they are lost, they need to be convinced that they are. This is much harder.

The Holy Spirit does the convincing, we help those who know they are lost.

So we pray that those who don't know come to realise they are, and we help them when they do!



Why did Jesus emphasize God rejoicing to the Pharisees?

Probably because they were so convinced that God could not stand sin (as they saw it). Jesus wanted them to know that the very people they thought were



scum caused God to celebrate when they repent. He was saying "Don't judge anyone": not the murderer on the cross nor the prostitute who followed Him or any other criminal or lifestyle. *All* can repent and make God rejoice!

The Fig Tree: Matthew 24: 30 - 35; Mark 13: 26 - 31 & Luke 21: 25 - 36

Why is this parable included in this weekend's material? It's not directly about the lost, but it is about the fact that Jesus is coming back, and that there is a limit to how long the lost have got before it's *too late*. By the same token, there is a limit to how long *we* have got to bring in the harvest, to get the message to those who need to hear it. The **Second Coming** is a fact, it is not a fairy tale. Matt 24:30 tells us three immediate effects of the second coming:

- all the nations will mourn
- Christ will be seen with His power and glory
- all God's people (His 'elect') will be gathered up

Why will the nations mourn? Because they will realise they have been wrong, and now it's too late. This passage should give us a sense of urgency about what we have to do.

But what is all this about fig trees? We can look at it on several levels.

Firstly, just as simply as it was said. We know spring is here and summer is coming when we see a tree beginning to show leaves. In the same way, we will know the time of the second coming is close when we see 'all these things' beginning to take place. *All what things?* Read through the earlier part of Matthew 24 and make a list for yourself! When we see the things listed there taking place we know His coming is near.

Many people also think there is a deeper meaning as to why Jesus chose the fig-tree. The fig tree was a symbol of the nation of Israel and often the old testament prophets alluded to it when they were speaking about Israel. Was Jesus prophesying that when the nation of Israel begins to put forth its leaves (begins to exist after a time when it did not) we would know the second coming was near, and people alive at that time ('this generation') would not all be dead before the second coming happened? If so, then He was speaking about 1948, when Israel came back into being after having been destroyed in 70AD. And *if so*, we don't have much time left!

The Sheep and the Goats: Matthew 25: 31 - 46

There are three parables that come together, right after Jesus has been talking about the second coming. The first is the ten virgins, which we've already looked at. then



comes the parable of the talents, and then this one. All three of them have something to do with the second coming, with what Jesus will be looking for and expect to find when He returns. He makes it very clear in the virgins parable, and again in the Talents parable, that not everyone will do what He wanted them to do. And its also clear in those two that he is talking about *His* bridesmaids and *His* servants, not those outside the flock. He shows that some of those who *think* they are His are not really. Why? Because, as He says, it is *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.* (John 14:21). So many say they love Him, but never obey Him.

Does that include you?

In the parable of the Sheep and Goats He expands this even further. He is talking to *disciples* remember, though He is speaking about all people.



Some people read this parable and think He is saying that the way you get into heaven is by doing good things to other people. Is He saying this?

There is no way He can be, because that goes against the rest of scripture and other things Jesus says. Notice that the righteous and unrighteous have already been selected *before* He speaks about what they did or did not do. Its as if He is saying "Look at the righteous over here... they were saved and because of that they served me by loving others. And the lost over here, they proved that they were lost by not caring about others". So a sign of being saved is that we begin to live the Jesus lived, for he went around doing good and caring for people (Acts 10:38). He didn't do this to make Himself the Son of God, He did it because He is the Son of God. In the same way, the righteous don't do good to get saved, but *because they are saved*. It is a sign of salvation. Jesus own brother, James, explains this more in his letter (its only 5 chapters, read it!).

What this parable, like the two before it, makes very clear, however is that there is a different ending for the two groups:

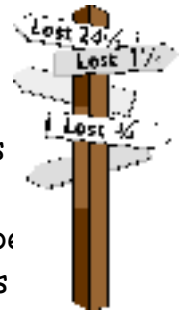
- the righteous enjoy *eternal life*
- the lost get *eternal punishment*



Which group are you in? What about your friends? Are you living in such a way as to point them to Jesus, or are they going to remain lost?

The Great Banquet:

Matthew 22 : 1- 14 & Luke 14: 15 - 24



Two slightly different stories about a great banquet or party. You know, its amazing how much of Jesus teaching happens at or is about parties, and yet people say Christians are boring! Well, God certainly isn't! Heaven is described as a party and feast over and over again. That's what we are invited to! Jesus telling these stories at feasts and to big crowds.

In the Matthew story the invited guests ignored the invitation. People often just refuse to listen to the gospel and don't even comment when they hear it. In Luke, the guests made weak excuses (who would buy a field if they hadn't already seen it, for instance). People often give silly reasons why they won't become Christians.

In both accounts Jesus says that those who were originally invited chose not to come.....that's the Jewish leaders. So God through open the party for everyone (I think He would have done anyway!). Again, its the lost that get brought in, the tramps and the sinners off the streets. God wants them with Him!

Now, if you take people off the streets you expect them to be dressed in rags, so fairly obviously this rich man must have given them all party clothes too. Otherwise, why did he get annoyed with the one man in rags? It seems that this guy had come to the party but refused to change into the clothes provided. What an insult to the host! So he got chucked out. What point was Jesus making?

God invites us all to His party. We come as sinners, but He cleanses us by His blood. However, if we choose not to be clean, not to wear the 'white robes of righteousness' (Revelation 7: 9 -13), then we will get chucked out. Heaven is for those who put on heavenly clothes. *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:26,27).* If we don't 'wear Christ' we can't get into the heavenly party.



What does it mean to 'wear Christ'?

The Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16: 19 - 31

Jesus is speaking to His disciples, and again He there are things He is not saying: He is not saying that the poor go to heaven and the rich go to hell. However, in this story it is the poor man who was righteous, and the rich man who wasn't.

What He is teaching is the eternal condition of the two: the righteous are comforted and the lost are tormented. It may not sound nice, but that is the truth.

There is a separation, just as in the sheep and goats parable. And both are conscious.

People often say "if only God would come down and show Himself, we'd all believe". Jesus counters this. He says that if people won't believe when they hear the Word of God (verse 31), then nothing will convince them. In other words, some people are so adamant they could never be saved. And those that will be saved will be convinced by hearing the Word of God.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10: 14,15). Our job is to be prepared to go out and to preach....for we have been called and we have been sent (read the last 5 verses of Matthew's gospel!). But will we go, or are we afraid and ashamed of the gospel?

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (Romans 1: 16 - 19).



Are you prepared to be a signpost to the lost?

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