

In this unit, pupils will find out about parables from the Bible and learn that most Christians believe that Jesus told some parables to share what the Kingdom of God is like and to invite people to join God's kingdom by letting God rule in their hearts. Pupils will learn about different ways that Christians may interpret these texts, exploring how believers put their beliefs into practice in a variety of ways, including through worship and service to the community. Pupils will spend time discussing what the parables that Jesus told might mean for Christians today and how they may have an impact on how Christians live. Pupils will focus on the parable of the great banquet and the parable of the unforgiving servant. They will explore how some Christians interpret these parables as saying that people need to accept the invitation to God's Kingdom and should not get distracted by the temptations of the world, and that forgiveness and mercy is at the heart of what it is to live under God's rule. Pupils will also find out about ways in which many Christians try to make the world more like God's Kingdom by challenging unjust social structures in their local area and around the world.

Key Vocabulary

- Parable
- Kingdom
- Salvation
- Forgiving
- Unforgiving
- Banquet
- Biblical
- Inheritance
- Social
- Unjust



Lesson 1: In Jesus' parables, who is invited into God's kingdom?

STEP 1: Share the big question for the unit with pupils. Find out what they already know and what they might want to find out. Tell pupils that Christians believe that Jesus came to Earth for a purpose and ask pupils if they can remember what this purpose was.

Show them the timeline linked to the big story of the Bible. Explain that many Christians believe Jesus' incarnation was a part of God's rescue plan for people. After the 'Fall' in Genesis 3, where human beings chose their own way, causing separation from God, people were not able to put things right. To rescue or save people, most Christians believe God came himself in Jesus – God 'in the flesh' (incarnate).

STEP 2: Hold a class discussion, asking pupils to speculate what Christians might believe about how Jesus was going to rescue people: e.g. show people how to live in harmony with God, repair the damage done by the 'Fall', to get people into heaven, make the world more like heaven. (Most Christians would say yes to all of these.)

STEP 3: Ask pupils if they recall what a parable is. Remind pupils that parables are found in the gospels; they are short stories that Jesus told, using familiar features of his listeners' world to teach them some spiritual truths, and to provoke an action or reaction in response. Ask pupils if they can recall any parables they have already learnt. E.g. the lost son, the good Samaritan.

STEP 4: Introduce the parable of the great banquet to pupils. Give pupils a text copy of this parable (Luke 14:12-24 – you might like to use the Good News Translation, available on Bible Gateway*). Read through the text with the pupils, discussing key themes and vocabulary. Encourage pupils to highlight and annotate their version of the text with the information that you discuss. Tell pupils that this parable tells the story of different people who are invited to a banquet.

Split pupils into table groups and encourage them to discuss the following questions:

- Who are the different groups that are invited?
- Why do the rich and successful people make excuses?
- Do you think this is a real banquet or does it represent something else?
- Is the feast in Heaven, or is it a banquet on Earth?
- Is the man giving the feast similar to God, or to Jesus?

Bring the class back together and encourage pupils to share their ideas linked to the questions.

STEP 5: Explain that Christians find a range of meanings in this parable: e.g.

- the person giving the feast represents God
- the feast represents God's kingdom
- some people are invited to a great feast but reject the offer and refuse to come, with some feeble excuses and distractions
- the invitation is offered to those you might least expect to be invited to such a feast, and many accept

- God generously invites all people to join the feast, but the invitations will not be available for ever.

Ask pupils to identify which parts of the story show which of these meanings, perhaps through colour coding the text and these meanings, or annotating the text.

See Inspiring RE Christians pp.27-32 and online for more on this and the other parables used in this unit. This is available as part of your NATRE membership. Currently available here

www.natre.org.uk/resources/termly-mailing/inspiring-re/christians/what-do-lsquo-parables-of-the-kingdom-rsquo-teach-christians/

* www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A12-25&version=GNT

Lesson 2: According to Jesus' teachings, how important is forgiveness in God's kingdom?

STEP 1: Use the sticky knowledge quiz slides to recap the key learning so far in the unit. Read the Great Banquet with pupils again. Ask them what it was about and why Jesus told the story. Ask what warning the story has for Christians (and other people).

Talk with pupils about the things in this world that they enjoy and like doing. Make a link to the kinds of things that might be distractions for Christians today and ask them to suggest why Christians might put off following Jesus.

STEP 2: Tell pupils that, in the gospels, Jesus tells many other parables to teach his followers about God's Kingdom. One is the parable of the unforgiving servant. Find this parable in Matthew 18:21-35* Read the opening two verses with pupils (Peter asks if it is enough to forgive someone seven times – Jesus says no – seventy times seven!). Talk with the class and ask them what kind of story they expect Jesus to tell about forgiving others. (Some may recall the parable of the lost son.)

STEP 3: Read the rest of the parable with the class. Ask them to think about all the emotions in the parable (e.g. questioning, fear, begging, relief, ungratefulness, hatred, outrage).

Tell the story again and ask each pupil to make an expression on their face (or make a body shape) to represent the emotion at each point in the story. Ask pupils what they think this story teaches about how important forgiveness is in God's kingdom.

Talk about whether it is always easy to forgive other people and when it is hard. Ask them what challenge Jesus gives his followers in this text.

STEP 4: Give pupils the following interpretations (see resource sheet 1). Ask them to place them on a continuum line from 'more likely to be Jesus' message' to 'less likely to be Jesus' message':

- If you have been forgiven, then you should forgive others (commentary for teacher: likely-given Jesus' teaching elsewhere)
- God is loving and forgives all wrongs, if people turn from evil and trust him (commentary for teacher: likely, given the story of God's repeated forgiveness through the Bible)
- It doesn't matter how you treat people, God is forgiving whatever you do (commentary for teacher: unlikely; Jesus argues for fairness and justice)
- Because people have been forgiven so generously by God, they should be generous in forgiving others (commentary for teacher: likely – Jesus sets the example; see if pupils recall the 'Golden Rule')
- Christian parents should forgive their children if they are mean, lying or unkind (commentary for teacher: likely, Jesus says people should keep on forgiving)
- Christians should never fight back if they are attacked, but forgive instead (commentary for teacher: quite likely; forgiveness, yes, but Christians don't agree about whether it is ok to fight (physically) for justice)
- Always save your money (commentary for teacher: good advice but not Jesus' main focus here)
- There is a price to pay for being unforgiving (commentary for teacher: likely – Jesus does warn people not to take God's forgiveness for granted – see the story of the great banquet above).

STEP 5: Talk with pupils about the story. Ask them what difference it would make if everyone practised forgiveness. Collect some concrete examples of how this could change the world.

Ask pupils to use their knowledge of the text and the teaching behind it to create a comic strip for a child in a Christian family to read. Tell pupils that their comic strip must share the story while also teaching the child why forgiveness is important.

STEP 6: When pupils have finished writing their comic strips, ask them to share them with their partner. See if they can help each other improve their work to make the message clearer.

*See, e.g. www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+18%3A21-35&version=GNT

Lesson 3: How does Christian Aid try to make the world more like God's kingdom?

STEP 1: Use the sticky knowledge quiz slides to recap the unit so far. Ask what pupils have found out about what is important in God's kingdom and who might be part of it. Discuss what they think Jesus would want to change about the world today.

STEP 2: Read through the two parables again with pupils and recall what they teach about the kind of world that Jesus wanted. Explain to pupils that today they are going to look at a Christian charity that tries to make the world more like God's kingdom.

STEP 3: Look at the work of Christian Aid. Watch a video on their work*.

Ask pupils to think of three ways in which this kind of work puts Jesus' teaching into practice and make the world more like God's kingdom. Explain that Christian Aid workers don't just go in and give things to people but help communities to build and sort things themselves with financial support.** Discuss the work of Christian Aid and how they ensure that everyone is invited. Pupils could also research the work of Christian Aid using their website.***

STEP 4: Explain to pupils that this lesson and next they will be working on an information leaflet about charities that try to make the world more like God's kingdom. This week they will focus on the work of Christian Aid. Explain that pupils will need to include the following:

- what the charity does and what motivates them.
- how the work of the charity links to Jesus' kingdom on Earth.
- make links to the parables that they studied earlier in the unit.
- explain how and why people might want to support this charity.

Once pupils have completed their designs, bring the class back together and encourage them to share their ideas. Ask pupils to list some ways in which this charity makes the world more like God's kingdom, and how Christians supporting the charity can make a difference.

*You might use some of the Christian Aid videos like this one:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsbenQsC5RM

**This video gives a short background to Christian Aid's work

www.youtube.com/watch?v=GT9JNpi0P44

*** www.christianaid.org.uk/

Lesson 4: How do Christians see God's kingdom as being now and in the future?

STEP 1: Use the sticky knowledge quiz slides to recap key learning from the unit so far.

Ask pupils to discuss what kind of kingdom Jesus teaches about, and what kind of king he would be (e.g. a kingdom where the outcasts are welcome, where forgiveness and fairness are on offer; a king who serves others and looks after the most vulnerable in society). Ensure that pupils connect their knowledge with the parables and charities that they have been finding out about.

STEP 2: Recall the parable of the great banquet. Note that some Christians see God's kingdom in different ways. One way is to see it as making this world a better place. Another is to see it as describing a future eternal perspective – about a future heaven. You might like to use the Christian song 'There is a Higher Throne' with pupils*. Discuss with pupils how the lyrics encourage Christians to focus on the eternal perspective. Ask pupils to wonder what difference it might make for how Christians live if they believe in heaven.

STEP 3: Ask pupils to recall the work of Christian Aid. They used to have a strapline: 'We believe in life before death.' Ask pupils to think about which perspective they have on God's kingdom. Explain that there are other Christian charities and organisations that try to bring about God's kingdom on Earth, such as the Prison Fellowship**. Use their website to explore why Christians might believe people in prison need to be shown love and forgiveness, and be given an invitation to God's kingdom. Ask pupils to talk about the work that this charity does***, how it supports prisoners and their families, and how it lives out the teachings of the parable of the great banquet.

STEP 4: Take the leaflets from last lesson and ask pupils to add some more information about how the Prison Fellowship shows Christians trying to bring about God's kingdom here on Earth. Explain that they will need to include the following things:

- key information about the work of the Prison Fellowship.
- make clear links between what these Christians do and what pupils learn from the parables studied within this unit.
- show their understanding of hope, love, forgiveness and an eternal perspective.

*Song and lyrics available online, such as here: <https://youtu.be/zvDSG4s5FJw>

** <https://prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/>

*** There are some videos of their work online, such as this one, which shows members of the fellowship talking about its work and inviting people to join: <https://youtu.be/5kO55QqKy4s>

Lesson 5: For Christians, what are the features of God's kingdom and Jesus' kingship?

STEP 1: Use the sticky knowledge quiz slides to recap the unit so far with pupils. Recall the parable that pupils studied about Jesus' teachings about God's kingdom. As a class look back at some of the themes within these parables that tell Christians how they should live their lives. Explain that today they are going to be studying two more very short parables to bring together their thinking about the Christian idea of the 'kingdom of God'.

STEP 2: Give pupils copies of Matthew 13:44 and Matthew 13:33*. Note that in the gospels, Jesus uses everyday items in his stories. Ask pupils to come up with three reasons why (e.g. so that people are reminded of his stories every time they see a field or some yeast, or someone annoys, them and they don't want to forgive; to make them memorable; to connect with their lives).

STEP 3: Give pupils the following features of God's kingdom, according to some Christians. Ask them to connect them to all or any of the parables they have studied, or to any other teachings of Jesus they have learnt already:

- God's kingdom is hidden but effective – a small start but a big impact
- God's kingdom is worth everything – gaining it brings joy
- Being in the kingdom is not an easy path and people must be generous and forgiving
- God is in charge, and he is welcoming and forgiving
- There will be a time when there won't be any more chances to join in
- Rejecting the invitation is a serious business

Ask pupils to reflect on why Jesus told stories and didn't just give a list of bullet points like this. Perhaps there is something about stories that gets under the skin.

STEP 4: The unit asks: for Christians, what kind of King is Jesus? Ask pupils to list at least three characteristics of Jesus' kingship, from their learning so far. For example, ask them to select from the following, noting that not all of them are relevant and that Christians disagree about some of them. According to the texts studied, was Jesus: strongminded, powerful, generous, loving, tall, commanding, a leader with followers, peaceful, a soldier, wise, unselfish, prayerful, bearded, a role model, forgiving, seeking justice, concerned with those on the margins, having an impact, prepared to sacrifice himself for others, God incarnate?

STEP 5: From the parables and charities studied, and the ideas about Jesus as king, ask pupils to come up with at least four ways they think Christians are expected to act if they are to make the world more like God's kingdom. Discuss whether these actions are only for people who follow Jesus, or whether any of them be good actions for people from other religious or non-religious traditions.

* e.g. using www.biblegateway.com

Lesson 6: How do Christians try to live in God's kingdom?

STEP 1: Use the sticky knowledge quiz slides to go back over the key knowledge for the unit. Encourage pupils to fill out the assessment sheet for this lesson.

STEP 2: Invite a Christian into school to talk to pupils about how they and their church work to bring God's kingdom here to Earth. Ask pupils to think of questions linked to their learning within the topic to ask them.