

Doctrine of Parables

Interpreting Parables

1. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is often called the Parable of the Lost Son.
2. The placement of the Parable of the Prodigal Son by Luke is within the context of a trilogy of parables.
3. That is proper because the synoptic gospels are not written with the template of chronology imposed by twenty-first century standards.
4. The gospel writers had freedom to arrange the material they preserved in an order of their own choosing, but always within the framework of the truth of history.
5. They sometimes arranged their material topically, rather than chronologically.
6. Luke introduces the parable in the setting of jealous Pharisees and scribes being critical of Jesus for associating Himself with publicans and sinners.
 - Luke 15:1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
7. The context became a perfect setting for Jesus to tell His story. There was conflict and tension. While sinners hung on every word of Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes were self-righteously critical.
8. The story telling begins with the Parable of the Lost Sheep.
 - Luke 15:3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying, 4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? 5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

“There were ninety and nine that safely lay
 In the shelter of the fold.
 But one was out on the hills away,
 Far off from the gates of gold.
 Away on the mountains wild and bare.
 Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.
 Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.

“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
 Are they not enough for Thee?”
 But the Shepherd made answer:
 “This sheep of Mine
 Has wandered away from Me;
 And although the road be rough and steep,
 I go to the desert to find My sheep,
 I go to the desert to find My sheep.”

But none of the ransomed ever knew
 How deep were the waters crossed;
 Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through
 Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
 Out in the desert He heard its cry,
 Sick and helpless and ready to die;
 Sick and helpless and ready to die.

“Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way
 That mark out the mountain’s track?”
 “They were shed for one who had gone astray
 Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.”
 “Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?”
 “They are pierced tonight by many a thorn;
 They are pierced tonight by many a thorn.”

And all through the mountains, thunder riven
 And up from the rocky steep,
 There arose a glad cry to the gate of Heaven,
 “Rejoice! I have found My sheep!”
 And the angels echoed around the throne,
 “Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!
 Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!”

Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1868

Music by
 Ira D. Sankey

9. Jesus did not come merely to save the lost, but to seek them. The church must do the same.

10. Pittsburgh pastor and evangelist John Guest says that the song about the ninety and nine has been replaced by the Mother Goose rhyme, "Leave them alone, and they'll come home, wagging their tails behind them". His point is that the church does not evangelize because it does not believe souls are lost and are in need of salvation.

11. The Parable of the Lost Sheep is followed by the Parable of the Lost Coin.

- Luke 15:8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? 9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. 10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

An organized woman is a virtuous woman. However, there is a practical problem. In a highly organized household, it is sometimes hard to remember where something was placed. What is not to be missed, is the quest for something valuable.

12. The Parable of the Lost Coin is followed by the parable of the Lost Son.

The Selfish Son

Luke 15

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

The Sinful Son

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

The Swine Feeding Son

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

The Insightful Son

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

The Saved Son

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

The Other Son

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. 31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Understanding the Trilogy of the Parables

In just a few words, Jesus said so much. Jesus tells the story of an impatient young man who wants his inheritance. Upon receiving it, the young man wants to get away from the watching eyes of his father, and so, he goes into a far country. He thought he would be free. He wanted to be anonymous. What happened next is predictable. He squandered his inheritance with riotous living.

It was not long before the young man was in need. Sin brought him to the swine, a symbol of that which is unclean. Sin forces a person to trade the life of a prince, to associate with the pigs. It was there that he came to himself.

How sad it is, that, the only time some people want to hear from God is when they have reached bottom. In the depths of despair people are more willing to listen.

The young man found himself in a position where no one would give him anything. His father had given him everything, and he despised the gifts of his father. Now he is coveting the slop being fed to the pigs.

Then, the young man came to himself, and spoke the truth to himself. While the young man came to himself, he did not come by himself. He had a spiritual awakening.

In the history of the Church, when God visits His people, the language of an awakening is used. The Church remembers the Great Awakening in America that took place in the 1730's and 1740's. People who have followed spiritually torpid to the things of God, and pushed the consciousness of God out of their thinking, are suddenly awakened from the darkness of their slumber.

The young man came to himself. He began to think correctly. He began to think logically. In his father's house, the servants were better off than he was in his present condition.

Formulating a proper plea to his father, the young man determined to go home, broken, ashamed, repentant, and willing to work at whatever his father gave him to do. In this, the young man was like David, who also repented of his great transgressions.

True repentant acknowledges sin, and against whom the sin is committed. David said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." (Psalm 51:4) David confessed he had sinned against his heavenly Father, and the young man confessed he had sinned against his earthly father.

The young man was willing to go home, not to make more demands against his birthright, but to confess sin, to acknowledge his unworthiness not to live under the roof of his father, and to remain as a humble servant.

Now learn this truth. No one enters into the kingdom of God until they understand this truth. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3)

Repentance is not sorrow for being caught, or for suffering the negative consequences of one's guilt. True repentance comes when the heart acknowledges that it is not worthy to be included in the Father's house.

Now notice, that in the first two parables, there is a search that is being conducted. The shepherd searches for the lost sheep, and the woman searches for the lost coin. In like manner, the father searches for his son to this extent. The father looked to the horizon so that when his son was still far off, he saw him, and ran to him.

The father ran to him because he had compassion. So it is that God the Father has compassion on sinners, or else no one would ever be saved.

In compassion, the father ran down the road, and fell upon his son. He embraces him, kisses him, and brings him into the house. The order is given. "Kill the fatted calf." "Let the feast begin, for this, my son, was dead, but is alive again!"

A ring was put on the son's hand. Shoes were placed on his feet. He was clothed with a robe.

In like manner, God the Father places shoes on the feet of the believer so that he is shod with the gospel of peace. A ring is given to the believer, so that he might, through prayer, transact business. The believer is clothed with a robe of righteousness belonging to Jesus Christ.

All the honors that can be bestowed, are bestowed. And it is all given on the basis of grace.

The elder brother saw what the father was giving to the wayward son, and doing on his behalf, and the elder brother became angry. To him, a grave injustice was being done.

The elder brother pointed out he had not wasted the father's wealth with profligate living. He had not dishonored the father, and yet, there was no celebration.

The elder brother did not understand, just like the Pharisees did not understand. The mission of the father is to love the sinner. The mission of Jesus was to seek and to save that which is lost.

13. The motif of the three parables Jesus told is the value of the sheep, the value of the coin, and, the value of the son.