

PARABLES OF JESUS

THE PARABLES OF THE LOST SHEEP, THE LOST COIN AND THE PRODIGAL SON, LUKE 15:1-32

- A. Jesus' audience (1-2), *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*
1. Jesus called those following Him to listen to what He had to say in 14:35, *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*
 2. The unrighteous listened intently to Jesus' teaching.
 3. The self-righteous weren't listening but complained because Jesus associated with such people.
 4. Thomas Constable, *The following parables taught the religious leaders that sinners' return to God should be a cause for rejoicing rather than grumbling.*
- B. Jesus' teaching on the lost (3-32)
1. The parable of the lost sheep (3-7)
 - a. A man will search for one lost sheep even though he has secured ninety nine (3-4), *So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"*
 - 1) Jesus asks a rhetorical question, one in which no response is needed but is made personal, *What man of you.*
 - 2) Anyone who has a sheep gone missing will leave the other 99 sheep in search of the one lost sheep.
 - 3) There were many shepherds in Israel, a flock of 100 was common, and shepherds would count their flock nightly.
 - 4) Is it foolish to leave 99 sheep in *open country* just to search for one that is missing?
 - b. He rejoices with friends when he finds that one lost sheep (5-6), *And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'*
 - 1) The shepherd initiated the search for the lost sheep.
 - 2) He carried the sheep home on his shoulders as he was rejoicing.
 - 3) He encouraged friends and neighbors to rejoice with him since finding a lost sheep is extremely important.
 - 4) Jesus seeks out the lost, lovingly cares for them as if carrying them on His shoulders, and rejoices in their new-found safety.
 - a) Ezekiel 34:11, *For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.*
 - b) Luke 19:10, *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*
 - c. Jesus interprets the parable (7), *Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*
 - 1) Even as there is joy on earth when a lost sheep is found, so there is joy, more joy, in heaven over one sinner who repents.
 - 2) The one lost sheep is a sinner (tax collectors and sinners) but the 99 sheep left in the open country are self-righteous person who think they don't need to repent (Pharisees and scribes).
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *Jesus was using the term "righteous" in irony. They were not really righteous, but they considered themselves righteous. The contrast then is between God's joy over one sinner's salvation compared to His sorrow over 99 self-righteous people's lack of salvation.*
 - 4) Jesus justified His association with sinners because saving sinners is the will of the Father.
 2. The parable of the lost coin (8-10)
 - a. A woman will diligently search for a lost coin (8), *Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?*
 - 1) *Or,* This parable repeats the key points of the first parable, emphasizing the importance of the message.
 - 2) A woman has 10 coins but one is missing. She takes considerable effort to find the lost coin.
 - 3) A silver coin was the Greek drachma, equivalent to the Roman denarii, each worth about a day's wage.
 - 4) Jeremias, *They (the coins) may have been part of the dowery or the savings that some Palestinian women wore around their heads on a chain.*
 - 5) The coin meant a lot to the woman based on the effort she took to find it.

- b. There is joy when the coin is found (9), *And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'*
- 1) She calls friends and neighbors together to rejoice with her good fortune in finding her lost coin.
 - 2) Her diligent search was worth the effort.
- c. Jesus interprets the parable (10), *Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*
- 1) Heaven rejoices when one sinner repents.
 - 2) It took great effort for Jesus to seek and save the lost.
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *This parable repeated the point of the previous one, namely that there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents. However, it also stresses the fact that God willingly goes to great lengths to seek out and to find the lost. This attitude contrasts with that of the Pharisees and lawyers (v. 2).*
- d. Possible emphasis of each parable.
- 1) The Lost Sheep may be a focus on Jews since it dealt with a sheep from the Master's fold, as seen in Ezekiel 34:11.
 - 2) The Lost Coin may be a focus on Gentiles since it dealt with a Greek coin.
 - 3) Also, the numbers may be significant: 1 out of 100 in contrast to 1 out of 10. As seen in Acts, there were more Gentiles who came to faith than Jews.
3. The parable of the lost (prodigal) son (11-32)
- a. The setting - a father and his two sons (11), *And he said, "There was a man who had two sons.*
- 1) Darrell Bock, *This parable is often called 'The Prodigal Son,' but it is really about different reactions to the prodigal. The key reaction is that of the father, who is excited to receive his son back. Thus a better name for the parable is 'The Forgiving Father.'* A sub-theme is the reaction of the older brother, so that one can subtitle the parable with the addendum: *'and the Begrudging Brother.*
 - 2) The theme of the first two parables is continued in this parable. God cares about the lost and wants them to repent.
- b. The actions of the younger son (12-20a)
- 1) He asked for his inheritance, left his home, and spent all he was given (12-14), *And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.*
 - a) It was unusual for a child to request his inheritance from his father since it would have been disbursed when the father died.
 - b) The father was gracious in granting the young man's request.
 - c) The young man was foolish in his use of the inheritance and circumstances turned against him.
 - 2) He found a job feeding pigs (15-16), *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*
 - a) He found work feeding pigs which was unclean work for a Jew.
 - b) Out of desperation, he ate the same food that was given to the pigs.
 - c) Richard Lenski, *...neither sense nor reason exists in sin but the very contrary.*

- 3) He decided to go home and ask His father to hire him as a servant (17-20a), ***“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father.***
 - a) *But when he came to himself*, the young man repented. He turned from his sin toward *heaven* (God) and his earthly father.
 - b) Note response of David in Psalm 51:4, *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*
 - c) The young man was willing to live as a servant in his father’s house.
 - d) I fear we too often feel God is looking for servants not sons.
- c. The response of the father (20b-24)
 - 1) The father saw his son returning, felt compassion and greeted him warmly (20b), ***But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.***
 - a) The father was looking for his son to return, Dwight Pentecost, *...the father expected the son to return, and so each day the father evidently traveled a considerable distance from the house to a vantage point where he could discern the son’s return at the earliest possible moment. Thus this father eagerly anticipated the return of his son.*
 - b) He had compassion when he saw his son and ran and showered affection on him, Dwight Pentecost, *The father’s love did not begin with the son’s return. The father had never ceased to love his son. He loved his son even when the son was worthy of no love. He loved the son even when the son was estranged from him. He loved the son even when the son was squandering his inheritance in wild living. He loved the son even when the son had stooped to become a swineherd. He loved the son when the son was unworthy of any love.*
 - c) Thomas Constable, *The father initiated the restoration of fellowship before the son could articulate his confession.*
 - 2) The son confessed his sin to his father (21), ***And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’***
 - a) The son acknowledge the gravity of his betrayal of his father.
 - b) He told his father his confession which he had practiced (18-19).
 - c) The young man thought his father’s love had been based on worthiness not relationship.
 - 3) The father responded by having a banquet prepared to honor his son who had come home (22-24), ***But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.***
 - a) The father responded to his son’s confession by calling his servants to bring items that identify the young man as a son not a servant.
 - 1] The robe signified the son’s relationship to his father as an heir not a servant.
 - 2] The ring was a badge of authority.
 - 3] Shoes show that he would not be considered a barefoot servant but a son.
 - 4] The fattened calf had been ready for this time anticipated by the father.
 - b) The father accepted the son based on relationship not change proven by time.
 - d) Gary Inrig, *It makes sense to wait for a son to achieve worthiness. It is reasonable to treat a repentant person according to the stage of penance achieved. But that is not the Father our Lord describes. It is not a parable of merits. Here is a picture of grace.*
 - e) Zane Hodges, *To an alarming degree it [the evangelical church of today] has lost touch with the unconditional love of God.*

- d. The attitude of the older brother (25-30)
- 1) He was indignant when he heard that his brother was being welcomed home with a banquet (25-27), *“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’*
 - a) The older son returned home to sounds of a party he was missing because he was working hard for his father.
 - b) He asked one of the servants what was taking place and was told that his father was celebrating his brother’s return.
 - 2) He felt that he was never honored in such a way even though he had been an obedient son (28-30), *But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’*
 - a) The older brother responded with anger and refused to attend the banquet.
 - b) The father made an appeal to his son who responded with anger at his father’s forgiveness of the younger brother.
 - c) The older son based relationship to his father on works.
 - 1] The older son didn’t even identify himself with his brother. He called the younger brother, *this son of yours.*
 - 2] Gary Inrig, *He hasn’t stayed home because he loved his father, but because working in his fields was a way to get what he wanted.*
 - 3] The Pharisees and scribes felt they deserved honor because of their self-righteous works. They were offended that sinners could be accepted by God.
 - 4] J. Dwight Pentecost, *God had made available to them (the Pharisees and sinners) the same privileges that He made available to the sinner who returned to Him. However, the Pharisees had not come to God in order to receive from Him the benefits that He had provided; in spite of their profession of sonship, they were not considered sons. If they would do as the younger son did—that is, come to God and acknowledge their sinfulness and unworthiness—they could receive from Him the same blessings and privileges conferred on the sinner who repented.*
 - d) The father exhibited a loving relationship based on grace which always offends those who pursue works.
- e. The response of the father (31-32)
- 1) He told the older son that all he had was his (31), *And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.*
 - a) *Son*, the word for son is one used to emphasize tenderness.
 - b) The father loved the older son the same as he loved the younger son.
 - c) True love is based on grace not works.
 - d) As the older son needed a change of heart concerning his relationship to his father, so did the Pharisees and scribes concerning their relationship to God.
 - e) J. Dwight Pentecost, *God delights to bestow on the unworthy the privileges of sonship, and such privileges would be extended even to the Pharisees if they would do what the wayward son did—return to the Father, acknowledge their sinfulness, accept His forgiveness, and then enter into the privileges of sonship.*
 - 2) His joy was that the younger brother was dead but is now alive; he was lost but now is found (32), *It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.*
 - a) Family should be glad when a member is restored.
 - b) Building up the hurting does not tear down the healthy.
 - c) The religious leaders should have rejoiced in the repentance of sinners instead of rejecting them.

CONCLUSION

- A. J. Dwight Pentecost, *...the parable teaches that God loves sinners, that God searches for sinners, that God restores sinners, and that God confers the privileges and blessings of sonship on those who return to Him.*
- B. Because of Jesus' payment for sin, God deals with Christians by grace not works.
- C. Repentance is only for sinners because they know they need it and the self-righteous are certain they don't need it.