

PARABLES

THE LOST PARABLES

Ruth Gallagher

Parables are stories that fulfil a specific function in a specific way. A general definition of "parable" is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels.

Parables are stories that demand a response. More than simply instructing, Jesus seeks from his audience a response to provoke emotions, reactions, repentance and recognition of who He is and what the coming of the Kingdom means. Jesus told 39 parables in total.

The "Lost And Found" Parable (Luke 15:1-32)

Characteristics of the Pharisees:

- They loved the place of honor at banquets (Matthew 23:5).
- They loved to restrict the "saved" to a select few, the elite of Judaism (Matthew 23:13).
- They loved to focus on the technicalities (Matthew 23:16-24).
- They sought to protect and promote their own hypocrisy by concentrating on external "sins," rather than inner attitudes and motivations (Matthew 23:13-14, 25-36).

The Lost Sheep (15:3-7)

Jesus began by directing His critics' attention to their own attitudes and actions as it related to a lost sheep. The assumption is that every one of the Pharisees would have responded to the loss and finding of one sheep just as Jesus suggested. In a similar way, Jesus added, all of heaven rejoices over the repentance of one lost sinner. Heaven, too, rejoices more at the repentance of one lost sinner, more than over the 99 "righteous" who seemingly did not need to repent.

The Lost Coin (15:8-10)

Just as the shepherd would be touched by the loss of one sheep, the woman would "turn the house upside-down" to find that one lost coin. We get the impression that she would not stop until the lost coin was found.

Once again, heaven's joy at the repentance of one sinner is like this. It is the plan and purpose of God to save men, when the sinner repents, the angels rejoice in seeing God's purposes fulfilled.

Observations Concerning the First Two Parables:

1. In both parables, sinfulness is not stressed, but getting lost is: *"All of us like sheep have gone astray, We have turned, each one, to his own way; But the LORD has caused the wickedness of us all our sin, our injustice, our wrong doing, to fall on Him instead of us"* (Isaiah 53:6)
2. In both parables, the owner takes the initiative, seeking the lost. *"For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."* (Luke 19:10)
3. In both parables, the owner seeks diligently and persistently.
4. In both parables, the owner rejoices and invites and expects his neighbors to do likewise.
5. In both parables, the rejoicing of the one who has found the lost item is likened to the rejoicing of heaven to the salvation of one sinner. *"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents"* (Luke 15:7&10)

The Parable Of The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

There are three people in focus in this parable. The younger brother, the father, and the older brother:

The Younger Brother - This is an illustration of the state of the lost sinner or a rebellious Christian who has returned to a life of slavery, to sin (2 Peter 2:19-21, NLT). It is a picture of what sin really does in a person's life when he rejects the Father's will.

Sin promises freedom but brings slavery, (John 8:34).

The son devises a plan of action, though at a quick glance, it may seem that he is not truly repentant instead motivated by his hunger, a more thorough study of the text gives new insights:

- He is willing to give up his rights as his father's son and take on the position of his servant. Regardless of the motivation, it demonstrates a true humility and true repentance, not based on what he said but on what he was willing to do and eventually acted upon.
- He realized he had no right to claim a blessing upon return to his father's household, nor did he have anything to offer, except a life of service, in repentance of his previous actions. With that, he is prepared to fall at his father's feet and hope for forgiveness and mercy.

This is exactly what conversion is all about, ending a life of slavery to sin through confession to the Father and faith in Jesus Christ and becoming a slave to righteousness, offering one's body as a living sacrifice (1 John 1:9).

The Father - Jesus portrays the father as waiting for his son, perhaps daily searching the distant road, hoping for his appearance. He is so filled with joy at his son's return that he doesn't even let him finish his confession. Nor does he question or lecture him. Instead, he unconditionally forgives him and accepts him back into fellowship.

The father running to his son, greeting him with a kiss and ordering the celebration is a picture of how our Heavenly Father feels towards sinners who repent. God greatly loves us, and patiently waits for us to repent so He can show us His great mercy, because He does not want any to perish.

The father then orders the servants to bring:

- The best robe - a sign of dignity and honor, proof of the prodigal's acceptance.
- A ring for the son's hand - a sign of authority and sonship.
- Sandals for his feet - a sign of not being a servant, as servants did not wear shoes (or, for that matter, rings or expensive clothing).
- Fatted calves in those times were saved for special occasions like the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32).

This was not just any party, it was a rare and complete celebration. Had the boy been dealt with according to the Law, there would have been a funeral, not a celebration. All these things represent what we receive in Christ upon salvation. The robe of the Redeemer's righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), the privilege of partaking of the Spirit of adoption (Ephesians 1:5), and feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, prepared to walk in the ways of holiness (Ephesians 6:15). A fattened calf is prepared, and a party is held (notice that blood was shed = atonement for sin) (Hebrews 9:22).

The Older Son - Parable of the Prodigal Son, the oldest son, who, once again, illustrates the Pharisees and the scribes. Outwardly they lived blameless lives, but inwardly their attitudes were abominable (Matthew 23:25-28). This was true of the older son who worked hard, obeyed his father, and brought no disgrace to his family or townspeople. It is obvious by his words and actions, upon his brothers return, that he is not showing love for his father or brother.

We do not know how this story ended for the oldest son, but we do know that the Pharisees continued to oppose Jesus and separate themselves from His followers. Despite the father's pleading for them to "come in," they refused and were the ones who instigated the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:59). A tragic ending to a story filled with such hope, mercy, joy, and forgiveness.

In conclusion, through these parables, God is eager to forgive and restore those who are willing to repent and turn away from their sins.