

The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Luke

SB_LK15-16_Three Parables Illustrating the Jew Who Strays With Additional Teaching

Introduction

To the dismay and disgust of the religious leaders, Jesus associated with those who were considered the outcasts and sinners. According to the first couple of verses in this chapter, it appears that Jesus did this on more than one occasion since He is accused of receiving sinners and eating with them. "The imperfect periphrastic 'were gathering' ... could indicate either the process of gathering at the time of the story or the habitual coming of "sinners" throughout Jesus' ministry."¹ The religious leaders animosity toward Jesus prompted Jesus to provide them with three parables that illustrate the principle that God was willing and waiting to receive any of His wayward children (i.e. Israel) who would return to Him. In these parables, Jesus was not illustrating the concept of lost fellowship with God that a believer can experience. He was illustrating the principle that unbelieving Israel still had an opportunity to believe.

The reason I take this position is twofold: 1) Jesus was addressing religious leaders who were unbelievers, i.e. they had not accepted Jesus as their Messiah, and they were insulted by the fact that sinners were coming to Jesus and accepting Him; and 2) verse 22 indicates that the Jew who came back received a new position that he did not have before. The Jews were God's children in the sense that they had a special covenant relationship to Him, i.e. the Abrahamic Covenant with amplification via the Land Covenant, Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant [(Abraham) Ge 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18; 26:2-4; 28:13-14; 35:11-12; (Land) Deut 30:1-10; (Davidic) 2 Sam 7:12-16; (New) Jer 31:31-34]. They were the recipients of the promises made to their forefathers and, as such, they had the privilege of being the children of promise. To rightfully inherit the benefits of those promises, they also needed to be spiritual children of faith like their father Abraham (Rom 9:4-6, 30-33).

Some view these parables as teaching a believer's restoration to fellowship with God. One cannot lose something he does not own, they reason, so the first two parables must represent children of God who come back to Him. Also, a son is already a son, so the third parable must be teaching that people who are believers can be restored to fellowship with God.²

The Lost Sheep (15:1-7)

The "sinner" who repents in this parable represents the sinners with whom Jesus has been associating. They are the one sheep which is not in the fold. Jesus is indicating God's willingness to pursue the one lost sheep, the sinner. The 99 righteous persons represent the Pharisees who thought themselves righteous, therefore in no need to repent. Jesus is not indicating that the 99 are not important. Rather, He is emphasizing that God will vigorously pursue the 1 straying sheep where positive volition existed. Furthermore, ***there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents.***

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

² Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1985), 244.

The Lost Coin (15:8-10)

A *drachma*, a Greek silver coin referred to only here in the New Testament, was equivalent to about a day's wages. "The point would have been clear to Jesus' listeners: the sinners with whom He was associating were extremely valuable to God."³ The point of this parable is the same as the first, i.e. ***there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents***. However, this parable emphasizes more strongly the thoroughness of the search.

The Parable of the Lost Son, a.k.a. The Prodigal Son (15:11-32)

This parable illustrates the point that Jesus was inviting all people, including "sinners," to enter the kingdom and that ***there is rejoicing when one sinner repents***. The younger son was entitled to half of what the elder son received (Deut 21:17), i.e. the first born son was entitled to a "double portion," therefore the younger son would have received half of the older son's allotment. Normally, an estate was not divided and distributed to the heirs until the father could no longer manage it well. The younger son was therefore requesting an unusual thing in asking for his share of the estate. The younger son (who represented the "sinners" with whom Jesus associated) took the wealth and squandered it on wild living (v. 13, 30).

Jesus' hearers would have gotten the point, i.e. Jesus had been accused of associating with sinners who were far from God and who were squandering their heritage as Jews in riotous living. The older son remained with the Father and represented the religious of Israel who perceived themselves as more righteous for having been faithful to the traditions of their fathers which had been derived from the Law. They were not "sinners" who had engaged in such riotous practices. The problem was that they did not understand nor make a distinction between the two major trends of the sin nature, i.e. the trend toward lasciviousness and the trend toward asceticism, which are both equally disdainful to the Lord (Rom 1:18-32; 2:1-16 cf. 2:17-3:31). The "sinners" were perceived as squandering their privilege as Jews even though the self-righteous, legalistic Jews had done so to an even greater degree. Their self-righteousness led to an unrepentant attitude and an emphasis upon outward conformance without the inner spiritual transformation in which God was more interested.

A famine occurred and the younger son had to resort to working for a foreigner feeding pigs, obviously something detestable to a Jew. The "far country" could have been east of the Sea of Galilee where Gentiles tended pigs. He became so hungry that he longed for the food he fed the pigs. The "pods" (v. 16) were likely carob pods from tall evergreen carob trees.⁴ As a Jew, he could have not gotten any lower. He realized that even as a servant of his father, he would be in a better position than he was now. Therefore, he fully expected to return and work for his father as a servant. He had the humility God longs to see in the repentant soul.

The older brother symbolized the attitude of the religious of Israel. By his own account, he had been faithful to his father and to his calling as the older son. He was entitled to his double portion, but he also wanted the younger to be punished and excluded from the family. Jesus uses the banquet motif again and the symbolism was very apparent, i.e. the banquet symbolized acceptance in the kingdom (13:29 cf. 14:15-24). "Sinners" were being accepted in the kingdom because of their repentant attitude.

The older brother (i.e. the religious leaders) got angry. The religious leaders did not like Jesus' message. The father in the parable went out to the older son and asked the older son to eat with them at the feast. Likewise, Jesus had dined with the religious leaders (e.g. 7:36; 11:37;

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 245.

14:1) and did not desire to exclude them from the kingdom, i.e. the banquet feast. The older brother had worked for years, yet he did not have a loving relationship with his father. Genetically, he was related, but not spiritually. He served out of a desire for reward, not as a result of a loving attitude. He considered himself in bondage. The father's words "son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours" indicates the religious leader's privileged position as members of God's chosen people. They were the recipients and guardians of the covenants and the law (Rom 3:1-2; 9:4). God's riches were infinite and there is no place for a selfish world-view that is ungracious in accepting any repentant soul because of past sinfulness. Such an attitude fails to recognize that all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

The Parable of the Unjust Steward (16:1-13)

This prompts Jesus to use the occasion to teach His disciples with a parable that illustrates the principle of forgiveness, grace and reward in the kingdom (16:1-13). The religious leaders react to Jesus' teaching and this prompts Jesus to illustrate their spiritual plight through additional teaching which includes a parable.

In this first parable, Jesus is teaching His disciples that they should use material things for future spiritual benefit, unlike the younger son in the previous parable. The steward was really a manager of a wealthy man's estate. Apparently, the manager was wasting the assets of his wealthy master through his incompetence. However, the manager proved to be shrewd by setting himself up for his life after the termination of his service with his master. There are perhaps three explanations of the manager's right to alter the amount his master was owed.

- The steward lowered the price on his own authority
- The steward removed the interest charge from the debt according to the Law (Lev 25:36, 37; Deut 15:7, 8; 23:20, 21)
- The steward removed his own commission, sacrificing his own money and not that of his master. The different rates of reduction reflects a different commission structure for each commodity.

Jesus used the parable to illustrate the fact that like the shrewd manager, the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light, i.e. those who are recipients of the promises and the covenants. The manager sought a way to make his life more comfortable. The sons of light should act shrewdly by using their material possessions for future blessing and provision. If a son of the light is faithful in his use of money, then he can be trusted with greater things. Another application that Jesus made from this parable is that a person cannot serve both God and money. Money (possessions) is to be used to advance the truth, i.e. the message of the kingdom in their day.

The Religious Leaders React and Jesus Attacks Their Weakness (16:14-18)

The religious leaders looked at Jesus and His followers who had no money and sneered. They saw Him as a poor man, yet He had the nerve to teach about money. Jesus knew that their basis for self-evaluation rested in how others perceived them. They focused all their efforts upon maintaining a pseudo outward respectability as they emphasized adherence to the letter of the Law. Yet Jesus taught that the law and the prophets were in fact important until John the Baptist who taught the gospel of the kingdom. Now, the nearness of the kingdom was being overlooked and even opposed by those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah. He would in fact fulfill all of the Law.

Jesus also taught a principle that really attacked the religious leaders on a sensitive point as we have seen in our previous study of Matthew 19. The Pharisees often tested or opposed Jesus in some way. Their tests were not designed to satisfy questions from a mind receptive to the Truth. Their tests were designed to trap or ensnare.

Within Jewish religious circles there were roughly two opposing camps regarding the issue of divorce. Both the Rabbinic school of Hillel and Shammai permitted divorce of the woman by the man on the grounds of “something indecent” in Deuteronomy 24:1. However, they disagreed on what “indecent” might include.

- The school of Shammai interpreted “something indecent” to refer to any gross indecency to include adultery.
- The school of Hillel interpreted “something indecent” to refer to almost any kind of real or imagined offense, e.g. an improperly cooked meal or even becoming less attractive to the man.

The result of these positions led to very frequent divorces within the Pharisaic community to the point of divorce becoming a scandal. For instance, Josephus, a Pharisee who was himself a divorcee, viewed divorce to be permitted for any reason whatsoever. By highlighting this hypocritical practice among the religious leaders, Jesus pointed out the discrepancy between their outward façade and their inner spiritually darkened state.

The Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31)

To understand this passage requires an understanding of Biblical teaching on the subject of the residence of the souls and spirits after death.⁵ The beggar, Lazarus, went to a portion of hades known as Abraham’s bosom or paradise. This was the abode of all OT saints (Age of Israel and prior) while they await their resurrection. The rich man went to torments which is the abode of all unbelievers while they await the Lake of Fire at the Second Resurrection. The point of the parable is that the “respectable” by the world’s standards are not necessarily righteous. This point was directed toward the religious leaders who had a false sense of what constituted approval by God, i.e. material wealth and approval from man. On the other hand, those who didn’t

⁵ The abode of the dead can be categorized as follows:

- ➤ ➤ Gehenna – this is the term that Jesus used to warn of the consequences of rejecting Him (Matt 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43, 45, 47, Lu 12:5). It is identical with the Lake of Fire in Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15). The 2nd Death and the Lake of Fire are identical in Revelation 20:14
- ➤ ➤ Sheol – this is synonymous with the grave – sometimes a general reference without an indication of righteous or wicked (Ge 37:35; 42:38; 1 Sa 2:6; 1 Ki 2:6; Job 14:3; 17:13, 16) – sometimes only of the wicked (Ps 9:17; Pro 23:14)
- ➤ ➤ The “Abyss” – This is also referred to as the “bottomless pit” and is the place where Satan is chained throughout the Millennium and prevented from having access to the earth. It is also the temporary abode of demons until they are cast into the Lake of Fire with Satan at the end of human history (Re 9:1-2; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3)
- ➤ ➤ “Tartarus” – This is the temporary prison of the angels that had sexual relations with women prior to the flood in Genesis 6 in violation of the rules of engagement in the Angelic Conflict (see 1 Pe 3:19-20; 2 Pe 2:4-5; Jude 6)
- ➤ ➤ “Hades” – This is synonymous with Sheol, but is seen in the NT as containing two compartments: torments and paradise
 - ○ ○ “Torments” (from Luke 16:23) – This is the abode of all unbelievers prior to their sentencing to the Lake of Fire at the Second Resurrection (see Matt 11:23; 16:18; Lu 10:15; 16:19-31; Re 20:13-14; Re 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14)
 - ○ ○ “Paradise” (from Luke 16:22) – This is the abode of all Old Testament saints prior to their resurrection. Nothing is mentioned in the Bible regarding the resurrection of the Age of Gentile believers, however it is likely that they are housed in paradise (a.k.a. Abraham’s bosom) with Age of Israel believers from the time of their death until their disembodied souls and spirits were transported with Christ to heaven (see Lu 16:19-31; 23:43; Ac 2:27, 31). They will receive their resurrection bodies at the Second Advent. After Christ’s resurrection, paradise is seen as in heaven (2 Co 12:1-4; Eph 4:8-10)

meet such standards such as the poor, maimed, lame, etc. would inherit wealth unimaginable in the afterlife because they had the right attitude toward the Messiah.