PICTURING THE KINGDOM: THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Week 3: Value of the Kingdom

The Parables of Luke 15

- The Parable of the Lost Sheep
- The Parable of the Lost Coin
- The Parable of the Lost Son

General Information

Luke’s Gospel

Luke 1:1 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,

Luke’s Gospel is the most ordered and detailed of all the Gospels. It was written to a general audience, but mostly geared to Gentiles. Luke presents Jesus as the ultimate “Son of Man.” Meaning more than any other Gospel, Luke focuses most on the humanity of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for all of humankind.

He includes the most detail of the birth of Jesus and then follows Jesus’ life and ministry focusing on His interactions with and example for all people. After His birth, the miracles of Jesus are emphasized, then in the largest section, His teachings – mainly through parables, these earthly stories that make a heavenly point. Luke’s gospel closes with the sacrifice and resurrection for Jesus and sets the stage for Acts, part 2 of his gospel work.

The “Lost” Parables

Jesus coming to seek and save the lost (becoming human, coming to us) is a common theme in this Gospel, so it is no surprise that Luke groups together these 3 parables that follow the theme of the lost that have been found.

Although they are often applied for people coming to Christ, they can also be applied for those believers who have turned away and then returned.

Setting

- General

By Luke 15, Jesus is making His way south along the eastern side of the Jordan River on His way from Galilee to Jerusalem. This would have been a common route for Jews to travel as it avoided Samaria (who were often at odds).

This is in the 3rd year of Jesus ministry and His popularity has already peaked. Beginning with His Transfiguration in Chapter 9, His opposition has been growing from the religious elite. His own rhetoric has also ramped up stressing His upcoming death, the cost of discipleship and the importance of following Him fully. Things are slowly building to a head that will explode in Jerusalem after His triumphal entry, leading to His arrest and crucifixion.
• Immediately preceding these parables

   In Chapter 14, Jesus is addressing crowds of followers about the importance of following Him. He had just stressed the importance of counting the cost of following, taking note that it is serious stuff. He closes the chapter with:

   Luke 14:35b He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

   To which many in the crowds (including tax collector and sinners began to respond by drawing closer. They got it and were ready to follow.

• Following these parables

   Following chapter 15, Jesus continues sharing parables, but they are more focused and directed to His disciples, preparing them for what lay ahead for Him and them.

Our Approach

7 Key Questions we’ll be asking

• What’s the setting where this is being delivered? (Place, Occasion, Audience)
• What’s the setting of the parable itself?
• Who are the main characters or objects?
• What happens in this story?
• Is there cultural information that may be helpful know about?
• What does this mean?
• Why is this important?

Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7)

Luke 15:1-7 ¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable:

⁴ "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? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ 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.' 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.

What’s the setting where this is being delivered?

Place
Occasion

Audience
- Tax collectors and sinners
- Pharisees and Scribes
- Disciples

What’s the setting of the parable itself?
This parable takes place outside of town in the fields where shepherds grazed their sheep. This was relatable to his crowd as shepherding was very common in this particular area given the proximity to good water and the Jordan River.

Who are the main characters or objects?
- Shepherd, lost sheep, not lost sheep, friends and neighbors

What happens in this story?

Is there cultural information that may be helpful know about?
Most shepherds at this time did not own their flocks. A flock this large was most likely owned by someone else who the shepherd worked for. Losing a sheep was a big deal, because he would have to replace it at the end of the day. Although it was also risky to leave the other sheep to look for a lost one as they could easily wander off.

Leaving them in the open was safer as they would stay together better and could see danger coming easier. Although one sheep is valuable, the amount of rejoicing here is a little disproportionate for a single sheep emphasizing the joy of God when one lost person is found.

When the sheep is found the shepherd carries him, which would lessen the chance of the sheep getting away and also speed the shepherd’s return. Sometimes a shepherd would even break the legs of a wandering sheep to keep it close to him so when it healed would be less likely to wander.

What does this mean?
This is a beautiful picture of God’s desire and His love for us. Jesus in John even referred to Himself as “The Good Shepherd.” This story could also be based in God’s word through Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 34:11-16 11 “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have
been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.  

13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country.  

14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.  

15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.  

16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

This parable teaches 2 important truths:

1. God __________ for the lost

2. God __________ over repentance

Why is this important?

QUESTION TO PONDER:

How does this parable better shape the way I deal with those I know that are lost?

**Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)**

Luke 15:8-10 "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?  

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.'  

10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
What’s the setting where this is being delivered?

*Same as above*

What’s the setting of the parable itself?

A woman in her house

Who are the main characters or objects?

Woman, coin (equal to about 1 day’s wage), friends & neighbors

What happens in this story?

Is there cultural information that may be helpful know about?

Women were not highly regarded by the Pharisees, so they may not have tracked with this as much,

The ten silver coins are most likely the woman’s *ketubah*, or dowry—the only money she brings into the marriage that is technically hers even if the marriage is dissolved. She only has 10 meaning her family was most likely poor and she is also poor.

The lamp here is a small, hand-held oil lamp, that provided a little light. By sweeping with a broom she might hope to hear the coin rattle against the floor that were dirt and stone..

What does this mean?

Why is this important?

**QUESTION TO PONDER:**

*What is one way I can be more diligent in seeking out the lost in my world?*

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 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. 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.

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. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 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. 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.' 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!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

What’s the setting where this is being delivered?

Same as above

What’s the setting of the parable itself?

A woman in her house

Who are the main characters or objects?

Father, older son, younger son

What happens in this story?

Is there cultural information that may be helpful know about?
Siblings and inheritances in the Jewish world were never equal. The first born would receive 2/3 while the younger would receive 1/3. Still it must have been substantial given the wealth of the man and the fact that he could release it while still living. The younger son is showing incredible disrespect to his family by requesting his share and then leaving with it.

The kiss of the father was a sign of acceptance and forgiveness, the robe was a way of welcoming him back into the family and the ring as sign of his renewed authority as a son (seemingly with a right still to an inheritance)

The older son would have taken a big loss in his inheritance with his brother’s return.

What does this mean?

*The relationship between the father and younger son.*

*The relationship between the father and older son.*

Why is this important?

The Pharisees and Scribes are like the older son...

The tax collectors and sinners are like the younger son...

**QUESTION TO PONDER:**

*How has God been a prodigal in His love for you?*

**Pulling these Parables Together**

The value and importance we attach to something is revealed by how much time and effort we give toward finding it when it is lost and by our joy upon recovering it. These stories show how valuable, special and important we are to God. He loves us personally and does everything possible to recover and restore us to Himself, rejoicing greatly when we are found by Him.
In each of these stories the value of what is lost increases. The first is losing 1/100\(^{th}\), the second 1/10\(^{th}\), the third ½. We also see an increase in the response of God to those that are lost.

**How do these fit together and what do they teach?**

*How God seeks the lost* (and we should too)

- With _____________, like the shepherd seeks the lost sheep.
- With _____________ like the woman seeks the lost coin
- With _____________ like the father seeks the lost son.

*How God receives the lost back* (and how we should too)

- With _____________, like the shepherd receives the lost sheep.
- With _____________ like the woman receives the lost coin
- With _____________ ________________ like the father receives the lost son.

**Reflection**

1. How did looking at these parables in context help you understand them better? Explain

2. What parable was most surprising in its meaning and why? Explain

3. What difference does this make when it comes to you sharing the message of the Gospel with those in your world? Explain