

The parable of the two debtors

Joshua Duran

Alliance University

Dr. Notley

04/19/2023

Introduction

Luke 7:36-50 tells the story of the parable of two debtors as shared by Jesus during a dinner gathering. A Pharisee hosts Jesus for dinner, whereupon an uninvited woman arrives on scene and falls upon Jesus' feet in tears while applying ointment onto them (Fitzmyer, 1985). Despite protestations from some around him, Jesus shares a parable featuring two individuals owing varying amounts of money yet being absolved by their creditor alike. Understanding the underlying degrees of the parable requires contextualizing it historically and culturally (Thecharaproject, 2023). The Gospel of Luke predominantly catered to a Gentile readership. The featured characters in this narrative are the Pharisees who were distinguished by their staunch adherence to religious principles and high moral standards for these cultural realities. This paper analyzes how this parable speaks to both ancient Jews as well as modern-day Christians regarding their moral obligations. A thorough analysis of the historical and cultural situation surrounding the parable yields profound insights into its significance both in antiquity and modern times. Through this analysis, people are able to gain a fresh perspective on how this story challenges conventional notions of righteousness and forgiveness while emphasizing self-awareness regarding personal sinfulness. It also emphasizes extending kindness and clemency towards fellow human beings as core components of Christian ethics.

Historical and Cultural Context

A prominent Jewish sect that arose in the 2nd century BCE was the Pharisees, who took pride in their strict observance of Jewish law along with emphasizing personal holiness. The people positioned themselves against another significant sect called Sadducees. In the first century CE, we learn about their knowledge of interpreting Torah laws and other elements of cultural importance, where these Pharisees became one of Judaism's most believable groups.

Jesus' conflicting relationship with some religious hierarchy is illustrated by this account because it occurs within a Pharisee's household. Having been invited by a Pharisee for supper, it is reasonable to understand that there may have been ulterior motives behind his request and he could be seeking an opportunity to put Jesus' authority on trial (Fitzmyer, 1985). Despite this possible intention by his host, Jesus used this chance presented before him efficiently using it as a teaching moment about compassion and forgiveness instead. In ancient Jewish society, anyone who broke any aspect of the traditional Jewish law or deemed immoral fell under the classification of a sinner group. This included both prostitutes and tax collectors who were members that often faced exclusion from mainstream events due to perceived moral deficiencies.

Apart from the discrimination they underwent within their community, sinners maintained connections with one another utilizing secret societies. In spite of the prevailing belief in Pharisaic Judaism, Jesus' message conveyed through the parable disputes conventional views of righteousness and instead emphasizes that demonstrating compassion and forgiveness towards everyone, irrespective of their social position or apparent moral outlook (Rose Publishing, 2018).

Analysis of the Parable

This story describes two people who have indebted themselves to a moneylender. One debtor owing significantly more than the other. When both were unable to repay their debts, they received full forgiveness from the lender. In questioning his followers' ideas on love towards creditors' entities, Jesus used this scenario as an illustration whereby he clarifies that people forgiven of greater liabilities typically harbor more love in their hearts towards those who forgave them. The two debtors in the parable illustrate two categories of people. These are: one owing a significant amount portrays those with deeper sins while the other represents individuals

with lesser offenses. The creditor reflects God's character, whose mercy knows no boundaries as He pardons both debtors without expecting anything in return (Thecharaproject, 2023).

Throughout the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus presented a challenge to his original audience's comprehension of righteousness and mercy. For years, the Pharisees had been recognized for their meticulous observance of Jewish law while believing that righteousness could only be achieved through noble deeds. Jesus contested this view and highlighted the importance of grace as well as forgivingness which can easily be obtained by those who repent and turn towards God. The lesson within this story is an imperative reminder of our need for humility by acknowledging our own faults rather than deeming ourselves more righteous than others. The story narrating a woman's act of love and devotion towards Jesus sheds light on several underlying themes that subvert patriarchal norms embedded within Jewish society during the first century (Rose Publishing, 2018). The most notable aspect being that women were forbidden to enter into men's households, let alone touch them. This woman boldly enters into the Pharisee's house and anoints Christ's feet with precious nard while weeping profusely. As such, Jesus sees this loving gesture as proof of her faithfulness to Him rather than adhering to social norms (Fitzmyer, 1985).

The importance of recognizing our own sinfulness and showing compassion is emphasized in the parable of the two debtors. This narrative challenges traditional views regarding forgiveness and righteousness, reminding us that we must first acknowledge our mistakes before extending kindness to others. God's abundant grace is highlighted throughout this story, as it is freely given to all who turn towards him in repentance (Rose Publishing, 2018).

Significance for Today

The parable of the two debtors remains relevant in contemporary Christian life and theology, posing a significant challenge to our conception of righteousness, forgiveness, and judgment. It urges us to display compassion and forgiveness towards others just as God forgave us, emphasizing that we are all sinners requiring God's mercy and grace irrespective of our social standing, transcending ethnicity or background.

Forgiveness plays a pivotal role in Christian life as implied by the parable. It teaches that Christians must forgive others just as God forgave humankind. Extending forgiveness applies to people who have wronged us as well as seeking pardon from individuals we oppress or harm intentionally or unintentionally done. Another lesson drawn is that human beings should not depend on good works to determine their righteousness; instead, it is a gift granted by God's grace. Therefore being humble and repentant before Christ even when recognizing one's sinfulness is vital. The parable presents a salient point that resonates with ongoing debates in Christian circles. The issue of social justice and the integration of marginalized groups finds relevance in the message conveyed through this tale. It urges us to display compassion and care towards everyone, irrespective of their standing or background. It also challenges us to keep an open mind towards those deemed as outcasts or alienated by society mainly with the poor, the sick, and historically oppressed communities (Fitzmyer, 1985).

Our approach towards others comes under scrutiny in the parable of the two debtors. It urges us to take a compassionate stance when interacting with those who we might consider wrongdoers or dissimilar from our own selves. This emphasizes their equal status in front of God, irrespective of their actions or lifestyle choices. People are therefore expected to demonstrate empathy rather than castigating them for their supposed errors, realizing that acts of grace and mercy can redeem even the worst deeds.

The importance of forgiveness forms the central theme of the well-known parable of two debtors told by Jesus. The story reminds Christians that they too are in need of God's mercy while also urging them to express compassion towards those they encounter. It calls for kindness and generosity toward anyone facing hardship, because justice tempered with mercy is ultimately what will bring peaceful change into people's lives. Expanding upon the virtues that we embody as individuals is critical to fostering stronger bonds within communities. The parable is imperative that we acknowledge our transgressions before God while simultaneously expressing immense gratitude for his unending love and mercy (Fitzmyer, 1985).

Conclusion

A timeless example of compassion and forgiveness is depicted in the parable of the two debtors found in Luke 7:36-50. Through an exploration of its historical setting, character development, and theological implications for contemporary Christians, we uncover valuable insights that apply both then and now. At its core, this narrative reminds us to extend grace with others as we have received it from God. The importance of heeding the message within this parable cannot be overstated for contemporary Christians. It urges us toward creating a more equitable and empathic society by focusing on individual changes. As illustrated by Jesus in this powerful presentation; forgiveness, humility and compassion are virtues worthy of emulation into daily life.

References

Fitzmyer, J. A. (1985). *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, translation, and notes.*

Anchor Bible.

Rose Publishing. (2018, December 5). *The deeper meaning in the parable of the two debtors.* <https://blog.rose-publishing.com/2018/12/05/the-deeper-meaning-in-the-parable-of-the-two-debtors/#.ZDUk2XZBzrc>

Thecharaproject. (2023, March 15). *The parable of the two debtors — The chara project.* The Chara Project. <https://www.thecharaproject.com/blog/parable-two-debtors>