Grace Wells

BIB336: Parables

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The Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32

The prodigal son is a famous parable that many people know even if they didn't grow up in the church. The story is from the Gospel of Luke in chapter 15. It begins with the father and his two sons, the younger son asked his father to give him his portion of the inheritance and went to waste it all in a far country. While the younger son was in the other country a famine hit the land. He had run out of the money that his father had given to him and he was sent to a field to feed the swine. He was so hungry that he wanted to eat the food that he was feeding to the pigs. When he finally thought it thought he realized that his father's servants were all fed. He decided to go back home to beg his father to allow him to just be a servant on his behalf - that he was no longer worthy to be called his son. Yet as he was on his way back home his father saw him even while he was far away and it says that he had compassion on him. He ran to him and fell on his neck and kissed him. The father called for the fattest calf to be brought and there to be a feast on behalf of his son returning, he says that his son was dead and now is alive again that he was lost and now is found. The older son was upset when he found out what had happened, he had been working for his father for all these years, and never once had he been made a feast. The father answered him saying you are always with me and all that he has is his, but we should be happy for your brother now because he was dead and is now alive again.

This parable is able to be easily relatable to those in the first century as well as in our time. It shows a deep desire for both redemption as well as acceptance and how Father is able to

fulfill the longing that we have in our souls. The audience of this parable was mixed. It was made up of both those who were of the religious hierarchy as well as outcasts. Jesus was always shown to be sitting and eating with sinners. The parable shows the same mercy that Jesus receives those who are sinners with acceptance. The Prodigal Son reveals how each son was lost in their own specific way. The eldest son might represent those who are of the Pharisees and scribes while the younger was to be that of sinners and outcasts. The Pharisees understood the Law but they didnt understand its true purpose. They had no genuine love for the Lord (Baker, 2022). Their focus was on seeming smart and better than those around them. They wanted to seem like they knew more than others but even though they had all the information they didn't know how to actually apply it effectively to their lives. They live their lives the way they want and try to use the Bible to back up their words but in reality they aren't actually following the true meaning. They learn from themselves not from God.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one of three parable that are told in Luke 15. These parables were to answer the Pharisees and their questions associated with being with sinners and tax collectors. The parable of the Lost Sheep has a pastoral metaphor and the parable of the Lost Coin as a domestic illustration. These parables are able to serve as a introduction into the story of the prodigal son. They all have common elements that something is lost and then found (Winters. Matthews.).

The author describes Barth's interpretation of the parable of the younger son leaving his fathers house as a depiction of Jesus who was sent into the world who became poor for our sake to be similar. Then later on in the parable when the younger son returns home and is celebrated by his father, Barth describes as being able to be seen as Jesus being one in His fellowship with

God the Father. The way that the son is reconciled with his father is how we can be reconciled to God (Bock, 1996).

This parable shows us the nature of the repentance that we receive from Jesus. This parable is able to recognize God as a common Father to all of us. This showed the people that God is not just God of the Jews but He is also the God of the Gentiles (Henry. Scott. 1979). He is rich in His mercy to anyone that will call on Him. Many people think that the way they will get to Heaven is by doing good deeds or that they need to somehow repay God their "debts" for everything they have done in this life. The son comes to his father ready to be his servant, to pay him back for all that he has lost. Yet his father was filled with compassion, just as God is filled with compassion for our mistakes that we do. God never runs out of His compassion for us even though we may continue to make mistakes.

The beginning of this parable shows the sinful state that the younger son is in. The book states that this sinful state is one of departure and distance from God, one of spending, of wanting, of a vile servitude, and one that is dissatisfaction (Henry. Scott. 1979). The son leaving his father can be compared to sinners who are fleeing from God. Even though he spent all he was given he was still in a state of want. We often want things that will satisfy us quickly and are not interested in things that will satisfy our souls. He thought that what was going to help him in his state was that he would go back to being a servant, as sinners we often think that something is going to bring us satisfaction but instead we are found with disappointment. We try to figure out how to live our lives by ourselves.

Ancient context has us look at the other parables mentioned in the chapter as well in order to get the full perspective. While the first two parables end with rejoicing with what was lost now was found, the lost son has a different type of ending. It has the aspect of rejoicing fof

the son but the ending is with the interaction between the older brother and the father. While all of Heaven rejoices for a sinner that comes back to God, this shows emphasis on those who are of the law. These people focus on the law not the meaning behind it and by doing this they need to actually re-evaluate the meaning of what being a follower of Jesus means in the first place. (Eric, 2022)

One central theme throughout the parable is seen as the bonds of family. Family was seen to be a central social aspect of everyone in the ancient world. Jesus even says that those who follow Him should love Him more than their mothers, fathers, siblings, and friends. Family back then was seen as the most important aspect, to disrespect your family the way that the son did was unthinkable (Pilch, 2017). This is why this story is such a great view of forgiveness that God provides for us. The father in the story provides a perfect example of how Jesus accepts us and desires for us to come back to Him as soon as we cant.

This parable is seen to be able to fit a pre-cross setting. The issues that are seen here are repentance and also the willingness of God to forgive us but it has no mention of the cross. The focus though is on theology and that it defends God's grace and compassion for us. Its design was to illustrate how we are received with our repentance no matter what we've done. But it is also about condemning those who may react poorly to the divine generosity that we have been granted (Bock, 1996).

A psycho-spiritual interpretation of the Prodigal Son allows us to have some modern context for the parable. Brendan Cook explains that there are many spiritual factors that are involved in the causes of sickness and disease and interpreting this parable can assist us in understanding how to readdress these problems. The Prodigal Son can be seen to have relations to domains such as psychology or philosophy. He views the prodigal son as a desire that's both

mimetic and triangular. He sees the fight between the father and the son as being along he narcissistic spectrum producing what is known today as the broken system of relationships or scapegoats. On the other end of the story the son returning home is pushed by the father's desire to be united. This can also be seen as Jesus' grace for us in our own lives. Humanity is broken but also the idea here is that Christ is not (Cook, 2021).

The father specifically in this story stands as a representative of God. God is seen to be our Heavenly Father and there is a likeness between Him and the father seen in this parable. One similarity specifically would be the great joy experienced when the lost son comes back home (Wilcock, 1979). This parable is part of a triad of parables, along with the parables; of the lost sheep and the lost silver coin. All of these parables have a similar moral. Man may have misery in being lost but God finds joy in finding the lost. The father in this story waits at home, this by no means is stating that he doesn't care about his son but God has sent out His spirit to save the lost. God is waiting for our joyful homecoming by saying home at his "home base." Jesus sees that we are lost but man also has to see that they themselves are lost. The very reason that Jesus came to this world was to save us from being lost. Our Father delights when what's lost is now found (Wilcock, 1979).

One specific saying in the parable is the quote "When he came to himself." This can be seen as Jesus saying that as long as a man is away from God that he is not truly himself. The son was only truly himself when he is on his way home. Jesus can be seen as saying that men are never essentially themselves until they come back home to God. The son wanting to be a slave for his father and the response his father had is very important to the story as well. The robe that was placed on him has a meaning of honor, the ring stands for authority, and the shoes that were placed on his feet meant the opposite of being a servant. Shoes were a sign of freedom to those

that were in slavery. The parable shouldn't have been called the Prodigal Son but more so the Parable of the Loving Father this author mentioned (Barclay 1956).

The parable has many themes that relate to the feeling of being lost and found. He can be seen to be lost at home even before he left his father's house. The request for his father's money was more than what we see it as today, it meant that he couldn't wait for his father to be dead. When he dies the son would be able to get his inheritance of one-third of everything that his father owned. The son probably despised his father for a long time, he wanted to be in control of his inheritance. He is then seen to be lost in another way when he ran away he was now lost in another country. He lived recklessly not caring about costs or the effects his lifestyle had on those around him (Ryken 2009).

This parable directly relates to the Gospel and how we sin as humans and God is gracious and will reach out to us with His repentance. Baker also refers to the older son in this passage as similar to the Pharisees and the younger son to tax collectors and sinners. These are who Jesus would draw near to and spend time with. (Baker, 2022) Jesus was always with those who others seemed to be unworthy of their love but no one is unworthy of Jesus' love. He wants to be with those that others may not want to be with. His love is never ending and He wants to be with us even if we continue to mess up.

This parable is a good reminder when we feel as though we may have messed up too much, that there is no way that we could be forgiven, and that God will always accept us back to Him. He welcomes us back with open arms. As the Father does in this story He runs to us, He is waiting for us to come back to Him. He wants to be in a constant community with us. How wonderful that we have such a loving Father who longs for us to return to be with Him. God will

always accept us back home. We are never too far gone for Him to not accept us back into His loving arms.

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