

11. Jesus Shared the Message of Forgiveness Through Parables

One of the things Jesus used to help make the Gospel clear to people was parables. (Someone once defined a parable as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning). As we help developing leaders grow in their understanding of how to share the Gospel with those who are not yet Christians, we want to help them learn to explain the parables Christ spoke.

One day, a large group of tax collectors and sinners came to hear Jesus. Christ knew they had come to Him, because they wanted to know how to have eternal life, unlike the Pharisees and scribes who had just the opposite reaction. Luke 15:1-2 says, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” The scribes and Pharisees did not want to have eternal life, nor did they want others to hear how to have eternal life. The tax collectors and sinners were thankful that Jesus accepted them and would talk with them.

In order to help the tax collectors, and sinners, understand how to have eternal life, Christ told three parables about things they understood very well. That is exactly what we want to teach developing spiritual leaders. We want to help them learn to take things that people understand and use those things to help them understand how to have eternal life. Let’s look at some lessons from those three parables.

The first parable was about a lost sheep. Luke 15:4-7 says, “‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’” I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” In this parable, Christ helped the tax collectors, and sinners, understand several things:

- ◆ The shepherd had a great concern for a lost sheep – John 10 tells us that Christ is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep.
- ◆ The shepherd kept searching for the lost sheep until he found it – Jesus shows that He never gives up as He seeks those that are lost.
- ◆ The shepherd was filled with rejoicing when he found the lost sheep – Christ is filled with joy every time a person places his or her trust in Christ.
- ◆ The shepherd brought the sheep home – Christ continues to bring every sheep He finds to the fold – John 10:16 “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”
- ◆ The shepherd called the neighbors to come and rejoice with him – Christ wants others to rejoice with Him when someone receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life.
- ◆ Jesus said there is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents – Jesus was letting the tax collectors and sinners know that they would be forgiven. It would bring great joy to Christ if even one of them would repent.

The second parable was about a lost coin. Luke 15:8-10 says, ““Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost.” Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”” In this parable, Christ again helped the tax collectors and sinners understand several things:

- The woman had a great concern for the lost coin – Jesus has a great concern for lost people.
- The woman worked hard to find the lost coin – Jesus will do whatever is necessary to find those who are lost.
- The woman kept looking until she found the coin – Jesus will keep seeking one who is lost.
- The woman called her friends together to rejoice with her – Jesus wants Christians to rejoice with Him every time a person becomes a Christian.
- Jesus said there is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents – Jesus told the tax collectors and sinners, for a second time, that they would be forgiven and it would bring great joy to Christ if even one of them would repent.

The third parable was about two lost sons. (One son knew he was a sinner. The second thought that his own efforts were good enough to please God). The one who knew he was a sinner represented the tax collectors and the sinners. The one who thought he was good enough to please God through his own efforts represented the scribes and Pharisees. We see in this parable that one son was lost, but was found. The second son was lost, but did not know he was lost, and would not come into the house of the father. Developing leaders need to be shown that the father had a concern for both lost sons.

As Christ talked about the choices of the younger son, the tax collectors and sinners probably identified with choices they had made earlier in their lives. Luke 15:11-13 tell us, “Then He said: ‘A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.” So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.”” The younger son shows us several things about the earlier lives of the tax collectors and sinners. They could all see themselves:

- The son demanded his rights – “Give me the portion of goods that falls to me.”
- The son wanted to leave home so he would not have to follow the rules of his parents.
- The son wanted to get far away from home so his parents would not know what he was doing.
- The son chose to “live for today and forget about tomorrow”. He wasted his possessions.
- The son chose to live a prodigal lifestyle – (wild sinful living).

Many of the tax collectors, and sinners, knew that Christ had just described their own choices.

Because all choices have consequences, Christ then showed the consequences of those choices. Good choices have good consequences and bad choices have bad consequences. Luke 15:14-16 says, “But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.” The tax collectors and sinners understood that they were living with

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the following consequences of their choices:

- ◆ There came a time in their lives when they had wasted all they had.
- ◆ There came a time when they began to have needs in their lives.
- ◆ There came a time when they had to make choices they did not like in order to survive – No good self-respecting Jewish man wanted to be associated with pigs, but this young man was more concerned about survival than self-respect.
- ◆ There came a time for many when they lost all self-respect. Would you poke a pig in the side and say “move over so I can share your food”?
- ◆ There came a time when the respected people would have nothing to do with them.

Christ showed that a person could turn from their former choices and make the choice to repent of their sin. Luke 15:17-19 says, “‘But when he came to himself, he said, “How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”’” The tax collectors and sinners learned that they could now make new choices:

- They could repent – “But when he came to himself”.
- They could remember that their father cared for his servants.
- They could remember that the servants of the father had their needs met.
- They could go to their father.
- They could confess their sin.
- They could become a servant of their father.

Christ shows the love of the heavenly Father to all those who repent of their sin and rebellion, which had caused them to go their own way. Luke 15:20-24 says, “‘And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” And they began to be merry.’” The tax collectors and sinners saw that God would receive them if they would repent and come to Him. Just as the earthly father showed his son, the Heavenly Father would:

- have compassion. The heavenly Father has great compassion.
- come to meet the repentant sinner. The son's father ran to him.
- show his love. The son's father fell on his neck and kissed him (regardless of the pigpen smell and dirt).
- accept his repentance from his sin.
- give him a new robe. Christians are given the robe of righteousness.
- put a ring on his finger. The father would identify him as his son.
- put shoes on his feet. Feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace – Ephesians 6:15.
- kill the fatted calf. The calf was saved for a special guest.
- give life to the son. Eternal life is given to all who repent of their sins and believe in Christ.

- celebrate the new life of the son.

These three parables show why the tax collectors and sinners came to hear Christ. Christ showed them compassion, instead of judging them. Christ offered them hope, instead of condemnation. Christ offered them forgiveness and eternal life. Christ promised that heaven would celebrate when they repented and came to Christ for forgiveness. These three parables, and many others, can be shared with a developing leader to help him understand how to reach people, who feel like they have been rejected by society because of their sinful lifestyle, for Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to share the compassion of Christ with those who have no hope.