

Week Seven reading: Luke 12 – 16

THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES

Jesus didn't start His ministry with parabolic (in parables) teaching; it came about midway through when the rejection of His message was gaining traction. The disciples asked Jesus directly in Matthew 13:10-17 why He taught in parables. He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

An explanation concerning this teaching style is given in *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, by J. Dwight Pentecost:

In response to the disciples' questions as to why He spoke in parables, Christ replied that He used the parables first to reveal truth to some men and second, to hide truth from other men (Matt. 13:11-15). Christ's answer would be unintelligible if one did not recall the historical situation. Christ through the course of His ministry has offered Himself to the nation as Savior and Sovereign. The nation had had that offer authenticated before them by the miracles which Christ performed. The nation was called on to respond to the evidence presented. The leaders had already indicated their purpose to reject the person of Christ and to discount His miracles because they believed His miracles were done by Satan's power. Christ has no further word for those who had rejected and spurned Him and persisted in their unbelief. On the other hand, some had believed His word and accepted His person, and these needed instruction. Christ was confronted by a mixed multitude comprised of both believers and unbelievers – those who had received and those who had rejected Him. Christ did not attempt to separate the unbelievers from the believers and then instruct only the believers. Rather, He contrasted His teaching in such a way that those who had believed would understand, and those who had rejected, even though they heard, would not understand.

In today's context, far removed from the first century agricultural Jewish setting, we have additional challenges to glean the teachings from some of the parables. But we have tools at our disposal to unearth these gems and inspect them for their value. To properly interpret a parable, here are three steps to follow:

1. Study the **historical context** in which the parable was spoken.
2. Identify the **question** to which Jesus was providing an answer.
3. Interpret the parable to **locate the answer to the question** Jesus addressed.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST – LUKE 15

1. What is the historical context in which this parable is spoken (Luke 15:1-2)?
 - a. The who (who is present for this teaching?) - **tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, teachers of the law**
 - b. The where and when (what is the timeframe/setting?) – **in a public social setting**, during the opposition period of His ministry (see chart showing the divisions of Jesus' ministry)
 - c. The why (why were these people gathered at this time?) – the 'sinners' wanted to hear more of Jesus' teaching; the 'teachers' wanted more reason to oppose Him

We study Him to know Him, and by knowing Him, learn how to better live for Him.

2. What question is Jesus answering (Luke 15:2)? **Why would He choose to be social with the sinners**

- **The Parable of the Lost, Luke 15.** This is one parable with three parts. Luke 15:3 states that Jesus told them this parable (singular noun in the Greek). This is one parable, explained three ways.
- The content of the parable, Luke 15:3-32:
 - What are the three lost items? **A Sheep, a Coin, a Son**
 - Part One
 - What was lost? The shepherd sought out a lost **sheep**, vs. 4
 - Why was it lost? The sheep was lost because it **strayed and wandered away from the shepherd**
 - Who does the lost represent? The sheep represents the thoughtless wanderer from God. Proverbs 19:27 reminds us, “If you stop listening to correction, my son, you will stray from the words of knowledge.”
 - What is the reaction when it is found? **There is immediate joy** and a celebration with others.
 - Part Two
 - What was lost? The woman sought out a lost **coin**, vs. 8
 - Why was it lost? The coin was **unconsciously misplaced**
 - Who does the lost represent? The coin did not do anything to become lost. This is a picture of the sinner who is largely ignorant of herself and passive in the hands of those with whom she associates. This illustration teaches that, even in a good environment, a person may still be lost. Revelation 3:17, “Because you say, I’m rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing, and you don’t know that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,”
 - What is the reaction when it is found? There is joy that is **shared with others**
 - Part Three
 - What was lost? The **younger of two sons**, vs. 12
 - Why was he lost? The son becomes lost because he deliberately, willfully, and consciously strays.
 - Who does the lost represent? The sinner who is caught up in her pride that she is the sole determination of her happiness, like those in Ephesians 4:18, “They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.”

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- What is the reaction when he is found? There is joy that is **shared with some but not all**
 - What is the plot twist in Part Three? **There is a self-righteous brother**
 - The older brother represents the Pharisaical attitude that resents God’s interest in sinners
 - Self-righteousness manifests itself in jealousy and envy
 - The self-righteous shun others who do not live up to their standard of righteousness. They miss the truth of Isaiah 64:6, “All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are alike a polluted garment; all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities carry us away like the wind.”
3. The answer to the question “Why would He choose to be social with the sinners”: By the time of sharing of this parable, the Pharisees stood condemned by Jesus and so they found fault with the work Jesus was doing. Their criticism implied that Jesus allowed these sinners in His presence because He was like them in character. They never understood that He allowed them in His presence to save them from their sins, as Ezekiel had prophesied in Ezekiel 34:11,16: “For this is what the Lord God says: See, I Myself will search for my flock and look for them...I will seek the lost, bring back the strays, bandage the injured, and strengthen the weak, but I will destroy the fat and the strong. I will shepherd them with justice.”

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE THREE PARTS

1. In the illustration of the sheep, the lost person is viewed from **man’s perspective** – he is one who suffers and therefore needs salvation.
2. In the illustration of the coin, the lost person is seen from **God’s perspective** – he is one who has great value and the loss of which God feels.
3. In the illustration of the son, the lost person is seen from _____ – the son who “came to his senses” and God, who feels a depth of agony toward a son who chose to walk away. We also see a son who rejects another’s restoration and the Father’s gentleness in rebuking that other son for his self-righteousness.
4. In these three parts, the value of the lost article steadily rises. One out of one hundred sheep...one out of ten coins...two out of two sons.
5. The illustrations appeal to three different experiences – agricultural...business/financial...familial/relational.
6. And each part presents an environment that causes one to be lost – the wanderer who doesn’t notice his straying into areas of danger...the sheltered one whose provision keeps him from being intentional about his own safety...the rebellious one whose desire for independence caused disdain for the authority that provides for him.

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O dear friend, you think yourself of small value, you who are conscious that you have sinned, but the church does not think you of small value, and the Holy Spirit does not despise you. He sets a high price upon you, and so do his people. We value your souls, we only wish we knew how to save them; we would spare no expense or pains if we might but be the means of finding you, and bringing you once more into the great Owner's hand. ~ Charles Spurgeon

APPLICATION FROM WEEK SEVEN

There is so much to learn from this familiar parable. What are some other details that stand out to you about the Parable of the Lost, from this lesson or from previous study? _____

The *who* of the “lost” in Luke 15 is not focused upon as much as *the condition of what is lost* and the agonizing effect upon *the one who lost it*. Can you call to mind someone dear to you who is lost? Consider the agony God must feel toward this one who is lost. What can you pray for this week on behalf of this dear person who is lost?

The definition of the word ‘prodigal’ is ‘having or giving something on a lavish scale’. Romans 2:4 says “Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” What does that word picture mean to you today? _____

Lord, may we – this week – understand more of Your heart toward those around us who are lost. And may it burn in us a tender spirit to be used by You to draw sinners toward Your kindness. May the kindness You lavished on us be a testimony shared with someone who needs to be found.

Memory/meditation verse: If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? Luke 11:13 (HCSB)

Week Eight reading: Matthew 19 – 20 | Mark 10 | Luke 17 – 19 | John 11

**Bonus chiasm material: what is the focal lesson for the two sons in Luke 15:11-32?

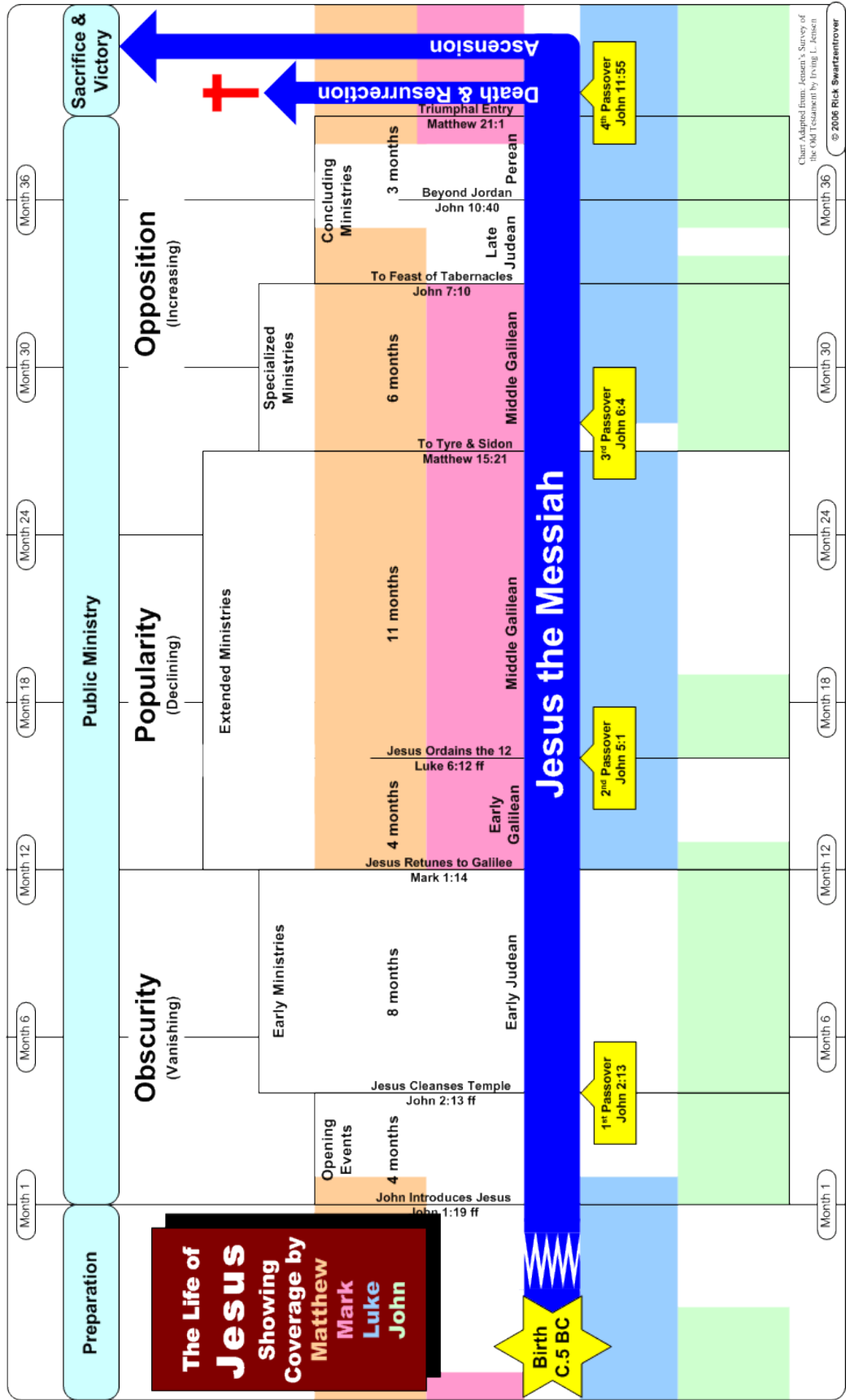
Younger son

Give me my estate
Traveled and squandered
Destitute and repentant
Restored as son
Wealth replaced
Home and celebrated
Given the estate and more

Older son

Given the estate and more
Never left and was a steward
Never lacked but resentful
Questioned his value as a son
Wealth never taken away
Home but not celebrated
Always had the estate and more

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