

STUDY NOTES ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON: -

Jesus is truly the Friend of sinners [although He was accused by the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders in a derogative sense of being “*a friend of publicans and sinners!*” – Luke 7:34.] The cold-hearted Pharisees took offence that Jesus would eat and socialize with the social outcasts of their society.

Luke 15: 1 & 2: - “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

In an attempt to correct this attitude of these hard-hearted religious hypocrites, Jesus told three parables, highlighting the seeking Love of God.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP: -

Luke 15:3 – 7: - “And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

- Matthew 18:11: - “For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.”
- Mark 2:17: - “When Jesus heard *it*, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN: -

Luke 15:8 – 10: - “Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*? And when she hath found *it*, she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

- 1st Timothy 2:3 & 4: - “For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”
- 2nd Peter 3:9: - “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

THE PRODIGAL¹ SON: -

Luke 15:11 – 16: - “And 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 falleth *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.”

¹ The word “Prodigal” is defined as: - “PRODIGAL, a. [L. produgus, from prodigo, to drive forth, to lavish.]

“1. Given to extravagant expenditures; expending money or other things without necessity; profuse, lavish; wasteful; not frugal or economical; as a prodigal man; the prodigal son. A man may be prodigal of his strength, of his health, of his life or blood, as well as of his money.” – Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary.

- The younger son asked for his inheritance early – before his father had died. He was obviously impatient to get his hands on his share of his father’s estate. He goes into a far country and squanders all of his inheritance in a very short period of time. He wasted his money in riotous or immoral living. – “Wine, Women and Song.” [See VS. 30 – on harlots according to his older brother.]
- Proverbs 23:20 & 21: - “Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe *a man* with rags.”
- Proverbs 28:7: - “Whoso keepeth the law *is* a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous *men* shameth his father.”
- Proverbs 29:3: - “Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth *his* substance.”

“A fool and his money are soon parted!”

- Now being in poverty, in a foreign land, friendless and in hunger, as a mighty famine breaks out [VS. 14], he is reduced to having to work for one of the local citizens, in the capacity of feeding swine, and of trying to meet his own needs of hunger, by eating the husks that the swine were being fed. This would have been extremely humiliating to a Jew, to have to tend swine. But even in famine, the love of God can reach us.

Romans 8:35: - “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

Luke 15:17 – 19: - “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”

- The expression in VS. 17 – “*when he came to himself*” – he came to his senses, having hit rock bottom, indicates that he repented of his disobedient and rebellious lifestyle. He planned what he was going to say to his father, when he returned home. He would acknowledge his sins freely, and would ask to be brought back into his father’s house, as a servant and not as a son. He had been humbled by the misguided choices he had made, which had resulted in him ending up starving in a pig sty!
- His repentance included several steps: - He left the place of his squalor and filth; he returned to his father’s house; he confessed his sins to his father; and he was completely humble and contrite.

And the Scriptures have repeatedly recorded for us, God’s merciful and loving response to any sinner who comes in humility and true repentance before Him. They will find mercy and forgiveness.

- 2nd Chronicles 7:14: - “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”
- Psalms 32:5: - “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.”
- Proverbs 28:13: - “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.”
- Isaiah 55:6 & 7: - “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”
- John 6:37: - “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”
- 1st John 2:1: - “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Luke 15:20 & 21: - “And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet 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 unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

- The repentant son puts into practise his resolutions to go home to his father’s household, and confess his sin with humility. And the father’s response is one of mercy and compassion to his repentant son. He goes and actually runs to meet him, embracing and kissing him in joy at his lost son coming back to the fold of his family. The Scriptures have repeatedly described God as being compassionate and merciful. Here is a small sample: -
- Psalm 85:15: - “But thou, O Lord, *art* a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.”
- Psalm 145:8: - “The LORD *is* gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.”
- Isaiah 57:15: - “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”
- Lamentations 3:20 – 26: - “My soul hath *them* still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. *It is of* the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. *They are* new every morning: great *is* thy faithfulness. The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him. *It is* good that *a man* should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.”

Luke 15:22 – 24: - “But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, 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 father’s response was immediate – bring the best robe and put it on his son, and put a ring upon his finger, and shoes for his feet. **It needs to be noted on this point**, that the son was clearly clothed in dirty rags, and he may not even had any sandals on his feet. No doubt, the father would have instructed his servants to strip off his son’s filthy rags, and they most probably washed him, before putting on the finest raiment his father had in his household. Then his father orders a feast to be held in honour of his returned son. The spiritual observation from this phase of the parable would indicate that, as all of our own [supposed] righteousness is as filthy rags, God strips off our filthy garments of sin, before He clothes us with the spotless garments of Christ’s righteousness.
- Isaiah 64:6: - “But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”
- Isaiah 61:10: - “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth *herself* with her jewels.”
- Zechariah 3:1 – 5: - “And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: *is* not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.”
- We note in VS. 24 & 32, the father plainly acknowledges the previous lost condition of his son, to the complete change of his son now – “*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*” We are ALL in this lost and spiritually dead condition before we turn to Christ in repentance, and our spiritual standing with the Lord completely changes.

- Ephesians 2:1: - “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”
- Colossians 2:13: - “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”
- John 5:24: - “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”
- We must remember that ALL we as sheep have gone astray from the ways of the Lord – as lost sheep.
- Psalms 119:176: - “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.”
- Isaiah 53:6: - “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Luke 15:25 – 32: - “Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

- The older son/brother’s response reveals that at heart he had the same spiritual attitude of the Pharisees and Scribes mentioned in VS. 2. This son was actually angry with his father for showing mercy to his wayward but repentant brother. His attitude also reveals that he was serving his father out of a sense of obligation, and not from a loving, heart service. He had no mercy on his repentant brother at all. But the Scriptures repeatedly exhort us to show mercy to our fellow human beings.
- Zechariah 7:8 – 10: - “And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.”
- Luke 6:36: - “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”
- James 2:13: - “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”
- In conclusion, God Himself has proclaimed His character to Moses, and the Lord has revealed His merciful or soft traits first, before He reveals His judicial traits of character.
- Exodus 34:5 – 7: - “And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.”

📖 The Parable of the Prodigal Son reveals God’s love and compassion upon those who have known the Father’s love, but who have turned away from Him into a life of sin and disobedience. There is hope with the Lord for every backslider, who comes to the Lord with heart felt repentance, confession of sin, and humility. God will be merciful to them!