

“God’s Mercy for Sinners”

Parables: Truth hidden in plain sight. Earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The first thing Jesus does when he begins His ministry is to proclaim, “Now is the day of Salvation” *“The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.”* The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke (synoptic gospel writers) proclaim that Jesus’ mission and ministry are to be observed and understood, according to the in terms of **“the Kingdom of God.”**

Jesus proclaims that His Kingdom is a **reign** not just a **realm**. He was establishing the authority inherent within a King to rule. All the gospels tell us this Kingdom is not just a **future home** but a **present reality**. While the Kingdom awaited future culmination, its effects in terms of messianic salvation could be felt in the present moment.

Using metaphors of new wine, the harvest time, and the wedding, Jesus proclaimed the dawning of the new age. Like the fig tree which puts forth its shoots as a sign that summer is near, so all the signs of healings, of blind eyes being opened, of the poor having the gospel preached to them, are signs of the time of salvation – the Messiah has come. The light has been kindled and this light cannot be hidden under a bushel or enclosed in a house, for it ignites the building and the whole countryside is lit. The secret of the Kingdom of God can no longer be hidden, for disease and death are giving way to the deliverer.

But the very fact that the chief characteristic of the messianic age is the promise of forgiveness, a year of Jubilee, an age of new and fresh beginnings led the messiah of this age into conflict with the Pharisees, Sadducees and other religious leaders who begrudged “God’s Mercy to Sinners.” Jesus used parables as weapons of controversy to vindicate his own association with sinners and tax-collectors, as well as his offer and proclamation of God’s mercy to them. He challenged the Pharisees and others to look at their unrighteous motives of selfishness. They were like wicked tenants who refused to pay what they owed. Rather they should be rejoicing in God’s mercy, like a father who has received a lost son, or a shepherd who had found his lost sheep, or a woman who after hours of search finally finds the coin she values. God’s great joy is in exercising forgiveness to sinners, and Jesus challenges the ecclesiastical establishment to participate in the great celebration of homecoming. PRAY

The parables are spoken to Pharisees, Sadducees and other religious leaders who begrudged “God’s mercy for sinners.”

Religious leaders had some major questions

1. Why does Jesus speak to these people?
2. Why doesn't Jesus purge and cleanse the sinners out of our community, **they felt that all Gentiles must be gone before there can be peace.**
3. These parables were not designed to announce God's mercy to sinners. These parables were addressed to those who were offended by God's mercy to sinners.

In this section Jesus directs parables in three ways

1. Jesus directs the critics attention to the poor to whom he is proclaiming the good news. Sick people need a physician!

The Two Debtors – Luke 7:41 There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the *one* whom he forgave more."

2. Jesus directs the critics attention to their own evil motives

The Two Sons – Matthew 21: ²⁸ "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' ²⁹ He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. ³⁰ Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I *go*, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of *his* father?"

They said to Him, "The first."

- a. The Wicked Caretaker – Mark 12:1-11; Matthew 21:33-44; Luke 20:9-18
- b. Pharisees and Tax Collectors – Luke 18:9-14

3. Jesus directs parables to the character of God.

- a. Lost Sheep – Luke 15:4-7
- b. Lost Coin – Luke 15:8-10
- c. Prodigal Son (Father's Love) – Luke 15:11-32

We must discover two things when we study the parables Jesus spoke:

1. Find the Sitz em Laben (Situation in Life) Original circumstances in which the parable was spoken.
2. Realize parables only represent one aspect of truth regarding the kingdom of God. We must be careful not to allegorize.

Allegory: a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or

material forms.

What the religious leaders expected of the Messiah?

1. Messiah would vindicate the righteousness of the Jews.
2. True Messiah would not associate with sinners.

Sinners: People who led immoral life

Certain occupations made you unapproachable by God: deprived of civil rights, couldn't hold office in legal proceeding, witness, peddlers, donkey drivers, customs officers, tax collectors, shepherds

If you expect something of someone and they don't do it, you get mad. If you were the one who it was expected of, you would correct their false expectations, that's what Jesus did...

Luke 15:1-7 – ¹Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ²And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” ³So He spoke this parable to them, saying: ⁴“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? ⁵And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And 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!’ ⁷I 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.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd / close relationship with the sheep / lay down his life for them

By means of this triune parable, Jesus set forth the supreme and sublime fact that as the Son of Man He came into the world to seek and save the lost.

These parables were not designed to announce God's mercy to sinners.

They are parables addressed to those who were offended by God's proclamation of mercy to sinners.

Lost, seek, found, rejoice.

Luke 15:8-10 – ⁸“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*? ⁹ 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!’ ¹⁰ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Extent of the search / **great worth of the coin** / from 1 of 100, to 1 of 10, to 1 of 2.

Luke 15:11-22 – ¹¹ Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. ¹² 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.

Deuteronomy 21:17 – tells us that the first born gets twice as much as others / double portions / Jesus wants optimum impact so he sets the story for the true punch... the older son who is not yet introduced.

He wanted out, unusual for a father to do this. Cannot be sold until death. He is not dead / tantamount to saying I wish you were dead. He demands not only possessions but the right of disposal. He took everything, leaving nothing, not even the possibility of return.

¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a **far country**, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. Dissolute / immoral the bottom... **Far country**, Paul, “alienated from the life of God” Utter degradation is the consequence, no love is found there.

¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. Leviticus 11:7 repulsive pigs / no Sabbath / deny religion at every turn Intertestamental period Antiochus Epiphanes 4 shove pig guts down priest’s throats

Deny God and his religion at every turn!!! To gain freedom he lost his character, his dignity, his pride and that which he sought ... his freedom.

¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, **The husks were the carob nuts which were the food of animals and of the utterly destitute. and no one gave him anything. Heart of Satan / sin for a season will always bring death / kill, steal, destroy**

¹⁷ “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! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and

before you,¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Label it Sin

The late Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman used to tell of a Methodist preacher who often spoke on the subject of sin. He minced no words, but defined sin as “that abominable thing that God hates.” A leader in his congregation came to him on one occasion and urged him to cease using the ugly word. Said he: “Dr. Blank, we wish you would not speak so plainly about sin. Our young people, hearing you, will be more likely to indulge in sin. Call it something else, as ‘inhibition,’ or ‘error’ or ‘mistake’ or even a ‘twist of nature’.” “I understand what you mean,” the preacher remarked and going to his desk brought out a little bottle. “This bottle,” he said, “contains strychnine. You will see that the red label here reads ‘Poison’”. Would you suggest that I change the label and paste one on that says, ‘Wintergreen?’ The more harmless the name the more dangerous the dose will be.”

True repentance – *“Whosoever desires to go to God, trusting his own dignity or making excuses instead of confessing his sin openly is in no condition to receive the forgiveness of God”*

Finishing verse 19... Make me like one of your hired servants.”

When the son came home he intended to make the request that his father should employ him as a hired servant. That was the lowest rank of all. In a large estate, there were three kinds of servants. There were those generally called bondmen. In theory they were slaves, but in fact they were almost part of the family and they had certain definite rights which are laid down in Exodus 21:2-6 and Leviticus 25:39-47. There were servants. These were the subordinates of the bondmen. Their life was harder but again they were regarded as being, as it were, on the circumference of the family. Lowest of all were the hired servants. They were hired by the day; at any moment and without warning or reason they might be dismissed; and they often lived on the verge of complete destitution.

“Verse 20... And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his **father saw** him and had compassion,

father saw: waiting and hoping he would return

What a precious touch Jesus gave to the narrative when He said that the excited father ran to meet his hungry, ragged, footsore boy! So weary, the prodigal could not run, but his aging father forgot his age and dignity and ran to meet the

wanderer. Compassion here, means, his vitals moved; the father's heart beat quickly. What a glimpse we have here into the heart of God! In His eagerness to welcome the returning, repentant sinner, He goes more than half way to meet him.

Finishing verse 20 and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.²¹

2 Samuel 14:33 King kissed Absalom as a sign of forgiveness. His father kissed the past into forgetfulness. **Verb in Greek means: He kissed him much.**

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.' ²² "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.

best robe: Robe worn by kings / robe of honor not disgrace.

Mark 16:5 – And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

Zech 3:3-4 – Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. ⁴ Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

put a ring on his hand... Ring: a signet ring, handed his son the rights to all his possessions.

sandals on his feet. Sandals: slaves went barefoot, no shoes. Stands for the full status of the son. Negro spiritual "All God's chullun got shoes"

Not a wage earner but honored guest / not just his needs but restoring him with honor

verse 23... and bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, Fatted calf: for an extreme special occasion and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. Now enters the real villain of the story... clearly the religious leaders who begrudged "God's mercy to Sinners". ²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed

the fatted calf.’²⁸ “But he was angry and would not go in.

The Jews regarded God, we may put it, as a doctor who had no use for sick people and wished nothing but their elimination. *Jesus regarded God as a doctor whose aim was to make well again all who were ill with the disease of sin.* However bad men are, God still wants them. The Jew, to some extent, would have agreed with that – on one condition. If the sinner repented and came crawling back on his hands and knees, God might accept him.

But note this – the first Jewish reaction is that God wants nothing to do with the sinner; the second and gentler reaction is that God will accept the sinner if he comes beseeching to Him.

Now here is the second utterly new thing Jesus says in these parables; He says that *God goes out to seek the sinner, or, that He is actually waiting and watching for the sinner to come home.* The Jew might in his gentler moments agree that God would accept a penitent sinner; but he never dreamed of a God who went out to look for sinners. The shepherd searched for the sheep; the woman searched for the coin; God searches for men.

So, these parables teach us first, that God wants the sinner. That is precisely what the strict Jew could not understand. They were quite certain that God approved of good people but had no use whatsoever for the sinner. *Three times Jesus talked about the joy that comes when something which has been lost is found.* To the Jew this would come as a staggering shock, for they had a saying, “There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world.”

Back to verse 28 in this as one commentator put it... **Pearl of Parables and the gospel in gospel**

Therefore, his father came out and pleaded with him.²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.’³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’³¹ “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. *As Salmond expresses it: “If the former parables show them how they ought to have acted, this one shows them how they had acted.”*”

God still shows love to the other son.

As Arnot puts it: “All the excesses of the prodigal will not shut him out of heaven, for he came repenting to his father: but all the virtues of the elder brother will not let him into heaven, for he cherished pride in his heart, and taunted his father for overlooking his worth.”

“All your lives you have been making a great profession of your devotion to God and now your attitude to me belies your whole profession. The people you brand as sinners have all their lives seemed to turn their backs on God; but now they have changed their minds and found a place in the kingdom of God, which you have thrown away.”

Isaiah 55:7 – Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

Jeremiah 33:8 – I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me.

Isaiah 1:18 – “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

John 8:11 – She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

COME HOME

Multitudes of saved sinners in heaven and on earth bless God for the matchless parable of the prodigal, resplendent with all the glories of divine grace and love. With its message of hope and call to faith may it still be used to woo and win myriads of wanderers back to the Father’s heart and home.

Countless multitudes are still lost in sin, but our God is the God of the lost, and longs for their return.

May we all KNOW that God LOVES to show “Mercy to Sinners”