



JESUS AS TEACHER (2)

Literary Structure of the Parables

Parallelism

Standard Parallelism - AA' BB' CC' DD' pattern

Luke 21:23,24

- A Alas for those who are with child
 A' and for those who give suck in those days
- B For great distress shall be upon the earth
 B' and wrath upon this people
- C They will fall by the edge of the sword
 C' and be led captive among all nations

Step Parallelism - A B C - A' B' C' pattern

- A Ask, and it will be given you
- B Seek, and you will find
- C Knock, and it will be opened to you
- A' For everyone who asks, receives
- B' And he who seeks, finds
- C' And to him who knocks it will be opened

- the surprise element. “Rather than experience the ruthless hostility he deserves and anticipates, the son witnesses an unexpected, visible demonstration of love.” The father acts replace speech - words become unnecessary.

- a kiss of reconciliation. In the Oriental situation, “when a serious quarrel has taken place in a village and reconciliation is achieved, a part of the ceremony enacted as a sacrament of reconciliation is a public kiss by the leading men involved.” *Bailey*, p.182

v21 - the partial speech of repentance, omits “make me like one of your hired servants. Forgoes his pride, wanting to work his way back and instead learns to accept grace. The point is not the lost money (which he could perhaps eventually repay as a hired servant). The point is the the broken relationship with the father which he cannot heal. He has no solution to offer. (gospel parallels?) The demonstration of the father’s love and acceptance makes that part of the speech unnecessary.

v22 ,23 - the presence of the servants - not back at the house, like an English butler, but there with the father on the street, looking for a clue about how they should treat the son - as an outcast?

- dress the son. They are told to dress him, as servants dress a king in a robe. They are not to just hand him the robe, but adorn him with it. The best robe probably belongs to the father himself, worn on feast days and other special occasions. As people come in to the feast and see the son, the wearing of his father’s robe, with all that implies, will assure acceptance. (gospel link - us being clothed with the robes of righteousness?)

- the ring is most likely a signet ring, a symbol of authority and trust

- sandals on the feet - only slaves went barefoot, another reminder of the terms of his acceptance and welcome, not as a slave but as a son.

- the fatted calf. The choice of such a large animal (compared to a goat or a sheep) means that most of the village will be present at the feast that evening. The entire animal will spoil in hours if it is not eaten (no fridge!) To kill a calf and not invite the community would be an insult to the community and a waste for the family. We could expect over 100 people to be invited; a calf is usually slaughtered for occasions like the marriage of the eldest son, or the visit of the governor of the province. The purpose of the banquet includes a desire to reconcile the boy to the whole community.

The Older Son - v24-32 - Cultural comments

v25 Why wasn’t the older son told of the banquet, but rather came and heard it? Probably the father knows the character of the older son and knows that he will be upset and probably

try to cancel the banquet. He is suspicious - he hears a party in progress and rather than just be eager to join in with the joy, he questions a servant.

In the original language, it is “kept on asking him”, meaning more than one question; the older brother wants to know whether the younger returned rich or poor.

v28 The older son refuses to go in. Custom requires his presence. At such a banquet the older son has a special semi-official responsibility. He is expected to move among the guests, offer compliments, make sure everybody has enough to eat, order the servants around and basically be a major-domo of the feast. This custom is widespread across the Arab world and in Iran where in the village, the older son stands at the door barefoot to greet the guests - part of the meaning of the custom is the symbolic nature of the gesture by which the father says “My older son is your servant.”

- this is an amazing and insulting breach of protocol. Even if he disagreed with his father, he should first have fulfilled his role at the feast, then later discussed it with his father. Instead, he argues with his father while the guests are still there. These actions by the older son are extremely insulting. The son is ignoring both the traditional customs and the authority of the father. There is now a break in the relationship between the father and the older son that is nearly as radical as the break between the father and the younger son at the beginning of the parable. His absence from the feast, where all the important people of the village will be present, is a deep insult to the father.

v31 - the surprising response of the father. The expected response is either: ignore the boy and proceed with the banquet, OR punish him for his insolence or at least display extreme displeasure.

However, for the second time that day the father goes down and out of the house offering in public humiliation a demonstration of unexpected love. He is anxious about the older son to, and does not come to rebuke or scold, but to entreat, plead with the older son.

- the older son’s response (contrast with the younger son’s, which was a contrite confession).

There is a double complaint:

1. He addresses his father with no title.
2. He demonstrates the attitude and spirit of a slave not a son, when he says, literally, “I have slaved for you.”

He fails to offer the esteem of a son to his father, and has been living with the spirit of a slave not the familiarity of a son. He says he has never disobeyed, but his attitude shows with what spirit he obeyed. The younger son was estranged and rebellious while absent from the house, but the older son was estranged and rebellious in his heart while he was in the house.

The older son accuses the father of favoritism, and would rather celebrate with his friends than with his family. His view of joy is a feast with his friends, yet he fails to see the joy of his

lost, returned brother. With “this son of yours” he both attacks the younger brother and disassociates himself from the family.

Again, how will the father respond?

The hearer expects the father to be furious, but again there is an outpouring of love. He ignores the omission of the title, uses his fatherly, affectionate title for the son in the face and the agony of his rejected love.

The theological cluster: the Pharisee listening to the telling of the parable is pressed to see himself in the character of the older son and to make the judgment “I am the man.” He cannot accept the joy of others finding faith. The ground and content of the judgment are found in a theological cluster with at least five themes:

1. Sin

The parable portrays two basic types of sinful man and illustrates the nature of sin and its results.

2. Repentance.

Two types of repentance are demonstrated (by the younger son). One is the repentance of a man who thinks he can save himself (“I will work”), the other the repentance of a man who knows he cannot.

3. Grace

The parable illustrates the nature of God’s freely offered love and tells of its cost. It is a love that seeks and suffers in order to save.

4. Joy

Joy is known in finding and celebrating communally the restoration of the one lost.

5. Sonship

One son is restored from death and servanthood. One insists on remaining a servant.

The Parable of the Two Debtors (Luke 7:36-50)

Imagine Tim Keller is speaking at his church in New York. Suddenly, in steps Lady Gaga, and sits herself down on Tim Keller's lap, weeping into his shoulder?

How would you react? How would the pastors or elders of the church react?

Cultural background and drama inform the understanding of this parable.

The overall structure (Seven scenes) is as follows:

1. Introduction (the Pharisee, Jesus, the woman)
 2. The Outpouring of the Woman's Love (in action)
 3. A Dialogue (Simon judges wrongly)
 4. A Parable
 5. A Dialogue (Simon judges rightly)
 6. The Outpouring of the Woman's Love (in retrospect)
7. Conclusion (the Pharisees, Jesus, the woman)

Introduction (Scene 1)

- in the first line, all three main characters are introduced
- probable scene - Jesus had just preached a sermon which impressed them, invited back to house to eat and continue the discussion (Jeremias)
- entertainment is a public affair:

...entertainment is a public affair. The gateway of the court, and the door...stand open...A long, low table, or more often merely the great wooden dishes, are placed along the center of the room, and low couches on either side, on which the guests, placed in order of their rank, recline, leaning on their left elbow, with their feet turned away from the table. Everyone on coming in takes off his sandals or slippers and leaves them at the door, socks or stockings being unknown. Servants stand behind the couches, and placing a wide, shallow basin on the

ground, pour water over it on the feet of the guests. To omit this courtesy would be to imply that the visitor was one of very inferior rank...Behind the servants, the loungers of the village crowd in, nor are they thought obtrusive in so doing (Tristram)

- this explains how the woman came to be in the house and how she could stand behind Jesus at his feet
- the feet are always behind because of their offensive, unclean nature in Oriental society
- the doors are open and the uninvited are free to wander in
- something is missing - no kiss from the host, Simon - a glaring omission. This is a marked sign of contempt or a claim to a much higher social position. This would have electrified the people watching - how will Jesus react?
- Compare to a traditional Western society, at entering someone's home. The formalities usually include:
 - a) remarks of welcome at the opening of the door, with an invitation to enter
 - b) taking the guests' coats and putting them in a prepared place
 - c) extending an invitation to sit down
- Simon has made a serious social faux-pas

In the House of the Pharisee: A Woman Acts! (Scene 2)

And when she learned, "He is dining in the Pharisee's house!"

bringing an alabaster flask of perfume

and standing behind him at his feet

weeping she began to **wet** his feet with her tears.

And she wiped them with the hair of her head,

and **kissed** his feet,

and **anointed** them with the perfume

(inverted parallelism)

a) She brings the perfume - then anoints his feet with it

- b) She stands at his feet - then kisses his feet
- c) She wets his feet with her tears - then wipes them with her hair

- this way of writing it, clearly emphasizes the three distinct actions (wash, kiss anoint)

- Her gifts are an expression of devotion in a sacrament of thanksgiving. The anointing of his feet is intentional (she came prepared with perfume), but the washing of his feet is not premeditated since she has nothing to dry them and is obliged to use her hair. She could not anoint his head - it would be presumptuous for a sinful woman to anoint a rabbi.

- the woman's actions are in deliberate response to Simon's inactions - she is outraged at the way Jesus has been treated. All guests in the Middle East are greeted with great deference and respect and always have been - in the case of a rabbi, one would expect the very best hospitality to be offered - the feet would be washed straight away, all male members of the household would kiss the rabbi's hand at the door.

- the woman has heard of God's freely offered love to sinners; it has overwhelmed her and triggered in her a deep desire to offer a grateful response

- the flask of perfume was worn around the neck, to sweeten the breath and perfume the person; it does not take much imagination how important such a flask would be to a prostitute. She intends to pour it on his feet - she does not need it any longer! The welcome of Jesus to sinners triggers her response (cf. Zaccheus Luke 19:8 in response to Jesus inviting himself to dinner)

- the woman is overcome at the insult to Jesus. Her devotion, gratitude, and anger mix. She forgets that she is in a circle of men hostile to her also. She can not kiss him (why?) But she can kiss his feet - that would not be misunderstood. She breaks down in tears but has nothing to wipe his feet dry with - Simon would not give her a towel if she asked, so she lets down her hair and uses that. (letting hair down in public was socially wrong - a woman should only do it in the presence of her husband - but perhaps the woman figures he has nothing to lose, since they know she is a prostitute anyway.) She is offering her love and trying to compensate for the insult that Jesus has received.

- Simon's calculated snub of the young rabbi is not going according to plan

- He could have apologized and thank the woman for having compensated for his rudeness, but instead the drama continues.

A Dialogue: Simon Judges Wrongly (Scene 3)

- Simon presents himself as a spiritual critic:
 - he questions the claim of Jesus to be a prophet
 - he questions the woman's spiritual state

All he sees is an immoral woman who has let her hair down and who is defiling one of his guests by her touch, a guest who is not perceptive enough to know it.

- Simon has rejected the validity of her repentance. In his eyes she is still “a sinner”.
- All in the room would have expected the rabbi to reject the woman.
- Simon condemns himself by calling Jesus “rabbi” or “teacher.” If Jesus is these things, then he is deserving the honor that Simon has neglected to give him.

A Parable (Scene 4)

- Two debtors, both unable to pay, both receiving “forgiveness” (grace); the difference is the amount. In Aramaic, the word for debt and sin is the same (*hobha*).

A Dialogue: Simon Judges Rightly (Scene 5)

- Simon is caught in a trap - he lamely tries to escape with “I suppose”, but the logic of the parable is inescapable.
- Love, in the parable, is a response to unmerited favor, a response to pure grace.
- Jesus then, having established the principle, moves on to shocking application

In the House of the Pharisee: A Woman Acts! (Scene 6)

- Jesus praises a woman in the company of men! Not only that, but she is shown to be honorable, in contrast to a MAN who is shown to be dishonorable. Outrageous behavior from a guest!
- Jesus shows a lack of appreciation for the hospitality shown him, against tradition

The guest in any society is expected to show appreciation for the hospitality extended to him regardless of how meager it might be. In the Middle East these expectations of the guest are solidified into an unwritten law. The host is expected to downgrade the quality of his

offerings as inadequate for the rank and nobility of his guest. Irrespective of what is set before him, the guest *must* say again and again that he is unworthy of the hospitality extended to him.

Kenneth Bailey, Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes, p.14, Book 2

- the speech is addressed to Simon, but delivered facing the woman - a speech in praise of her kindness and worth. It removes the tone of harsh accusation we might expect if Jesus were facing Simon.

- “I entered your house” - “I came in under your roof. I became your guest. You were responsible to extend to me the traditional forms of hospitality, but you refused!...This woman whom you despise has compensated amazingly for your failure.

- gave me no water for my feet. It would be presumptuous to assume Simon would do the washing of the feet (a servant’s job, or self-done), but he could have provided the water.

Contrast: The woman has washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her crown and glory: her hair

- no kiss. Simon referred to him as “rabbi” so should have kissed his hand.

Contrast: The woman has covered his feet with kisses (kept on kissing)

- no anointing with even cheap olive oil

Contrast: The woman has used an expensive perfume

- Simon has been compared to the woman, and found wanting - she, a lowly prostitute, is held up by Jesus as superior to Simon the Pharisee

- her sins have been forgiven BECAUSE she loved much? or her sins have been forgiven, THEREFORE she loved much

- see the other couplets

- in the parable of the debtors, their debts are forgiven first, then there is a thankful response of love

- in the concluding couplet (He who is forgiven little, loves little) forgiveness is first followed by a thankful response of love

- in the traditional translation of v47 (“her sins...have been forgiven, **for** she loved much”)

which is a direct contradiction of the other two couplets. It makes better linguistic, and theological sense to translate the Greek particle (hoti) “for” as “therefore.” The woman

doesn't earn her forgiveness by her demonstration of love. She has already received forgiveness, and in response, demonstrates this love.

- This woman is not, contrary to what Simon thinks, a defiling sinner, but a forgiven woman, who knows the extent of her evil ways, and also knows the grace of God extended to her.
- is Simon the one who has been forgiven little? e.g. "You, Simon, have many sins (some of which we have just recounted). You have little awareness of them and have not repented. Thus you have been forgiven little and, naturally, loved little."
- Simon's sins (in addition to his failures as a host, include:
 - deep pride
 - arrogance
 - hard heartedness
 - hostility
 - a judgmental spirit
 - weak understanding of what really defiles
 - a rejection of sinners
 - insensitivity
 - misunderstanding of the nature of God's forgiveness
 - sexism
- Perhaps the worst thing he does is witness the woman's dramatic action of outpouring love, yet still labels her "a sinner"(v39).
- A tale of two sinners:
 - one sins outside the law, one within it
 - one aware of her sin, accepting forgiveness, demonstrating love
 - one, unaware of his sin, not seeing his need of forgiveness, therefore loving little
- The ultimate twists:
 - the great unrepentant sinner, whose presence defiles, is not the woman, it is Simon!
 - the true prophet (Jesus) has not only read the woman's heart, he has read Simon's too
 - Simon, the judge, becomes the accused

Conclusion: The Pharisee, Jesus and the Woman (Scene 7)

- who is this that even forgives sins (as well as doing other outrageous things, like insult the host?)
- interactive story telling - we do not get to know Simon's response:
 - will he become aware of how much in need of grace and forgiveness he is, repent and offer expressions of love, that are currently so lacking in his life? OR
 - will his hostility and opposition to Jesus harden?

The Wedge

- What decision/response is Simon pressed to make?

“I am a great sinner (as was this woman). This I have not realized. I have not repented, nor have I heard the offer of the grace of God as this woman has. I have been forgiven little and thus have loved God's agent (Jesus) little. If Jesus really wants to avoid sinners, he should avoid me, not this woman whom I have despised.”

The Theological Cluster

1. Forgiveness (salvation) is a freely offered, unearned gift of God. Salvation is by faith.
2. When accepted, this salvation by faith immediately triggers costly acts of love. These acts of love are expressions of thanks for grace received, not attempts to gain more.
3. Jesus is God's unique agent through whom forgiveness is announced and to whom a grateful response of love is appropriately directed. The question in scene 7 is not answered - each reader must bring their own response.
4. There are two kinds of sinners: those who know it and know their need for forgiveness; those who don't and don't know how much they need God's grace. Repentance comes hardest for the “righteous.”
5. In a man's world, and at a banquet for men, a woman is held up as the heroine of faith, repentance and devotion. She is shown as better than a man (Simon) in these areas. The inherent worth of women, and the fact that the ministry of Jesus is for both is powerfully affirmed.
6. In a confrontation with Jesus, we are pushed to the point of the wedge. The options are faith or offense; there is no middle ground.

7. Jesus accepts Simon's invitation without hesitation. He is the friend of sinners, even the sinners who don't know they are sinners.

For further thought...

How would we react if we had seen a notorious sinner woman coming and sitting at the feet of Jesus? Would we want to drag her away so she didn't defile him?

Do we see sinners as who they are, or for what God can make of them?
See the different approaches to sinners exemplified by the Pharisee, and then by Jesus - who is actually dealing with two "sinners" - the woman, and Simon.

Why do you think that those outside the faith, such as tax collectors and sinners, prostitutes, lepers etc. were so drawn to Jesus?

What do we do that might be a turn-off for people we hope will one day get to know Jesus? In church? At work? In other settings?

What depth of love do you show Jesus? Is it appropriate for how much he has forgiven you?
How do you show your love for him?