

Bible Stories for Adults

Parables on Finding the Lost

Luke 15

Opening

- Gathering: What is your favorite parable and why?
- Today's Focus: Jesus taught in parables in order to reveal God's heavenly truths in ways that earth-based people could understand.
- Key Verses: *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.* Luke 15:10
- We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.* Luke 15:32

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Parables

What is a parable? = Get feedback from the class and write on a board
Jerome - "A shadow of truth cast before"

Sounds like a pleasant yarn, but keeps something up its sleeve which pops up and leaves you flat

Funk & Wagnalls = A short narrative making a religious point by comparison with natural things
= A "true-to-life" story used to make clear a heavenly truth; An earthly story with a heavenly meaning

What a parable is not:

Proverb (*Proverbs 22:6*) = A wise saying, does not include a story

Simile (*Psalms 1:3-4*) = One object is like another, simple resemblance

Metaphor (*John 6:35*) = One object is another, direct representation

Allegory (*John 15:1-8*) = One object implies another, interpret themselves

Fable (*Judges 9:8-15*) = Story leading to moral lesson, animals often get human qualities

Read an example of a short parable that sounds like a fable:

Matthew 21:28-31a = One son refuses work but does it, other accepts but doesn't

What truth pops up and knocks flat the self-righteous elders whom Jesus was addressing?

Matthew 21:31b-32 = Claiming to have faith is nothing like having faith

Parables must always be interpreted in the context of the lesson Jesus was teaching

Parabole = Greek for a placing side-by-side - analogy, similarity

Used only in Matthew (17 times), Mark (13), Luke (18) and Hebrews (2)

Hebrews uses for *symbolic* (9:9) and *figuratively* (11:19)

John uses *paroimia* = Greek for *proverb, wise saying*

Mashal = Hebrew for *parable, proverb, similarity*

Translated in Septuagint as *parabole*

Not used in Old Testament for fables (2 Kings 14:9), riddles (Judges 14:14), stories, etc.

Used as concept describing wisdom or revelation

Meshalim = Hebrew title of Book of Proverbs

Septuagint translated as *Paroimiai*

Translated to Latin in the Vulgate by Jerome as *Parabolai*

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Jesus' Parables (*Matthew 13*)

What did David foretell about the Messiah's manner of speaking?

Psalm 78:1-2 = *I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things*

How was this prophesy fulfilled by Jesus?

Matthew 13:34-35 = *... He did not say anything to them without using a parable*

Why did Jesus speak in parables?

Matthew 13:10-12 = Made messages more visible to followers and invisible to others

Were all of Jesus' parables stories?

Matthew 13:31-32 = Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed

Were all of Jesus' stories parables? = Don't read, just refer to

Luke 10:25-37 = Good Samaritan story, some say it is only illustrative, not a parable

Between 25 and 79 of Jesus' parables are recorded in the Bible

Depends on the definition used for parable

Parables of the Kingdom (*Matthew 13*)

What was Jesus' most common topic for comparison in a parable?

Matthew 13:44-46 = *The kingdom of heaven is like ... valuable treasure*

Were all of Jesus' parables descriptive of God or did some describe sinful man?

Luke 18:9-14 = Pharisee and tax collector parable given to confront self-righteousness

Did any parables teach us how to live as God's people?

Luke 18:1 (1-8) = Parable to teach that we show always pray without giving up

Did Jesus' followers understand His parables when He said them?

Matthew 13:36 = Disciples asked for explanation after they left the crowd

Did Jesus explain all of His parables, or were His disciples left to figure some out on their own?

Mark 4:33-34 = *He explained everything*

Why were those who didn't follow Jesus unable to understand His parables?

Matthew 13:13-15 = Fulfill Isaiah's prophesy that hearts, eyes and ears would be closed

Did any of Jesus' parables hit home with those outside of His followers?

Matthew 21:45 (28-45) = Chief priests and Pharisees knew He was talking about them

Who Were the Pharisees? (*Matthew 23*)

Why had the people of Judah been exiled to Babylon?

Nehemiah 9:29-30 = They continued to turn their backs on God and ignored His laws

What did the returned exiles do to show their commitment to God's law?

Nehemiah 9:38; 10:29 = Made a binding agreement to be obedient

What sect evolved that worked to make sure people didn't disobey the law, even accidentally?

Acts 26:5 = Pharisees, Even had 39 volumes detailing what it meant to work on the Sabbath

How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' complaint that He didn't follow their rules?

Mark 7:5-8 = They had traded God's commands for traditions of men

What did Jesus say about the Pharisees' efforts to get people to heaven by adding to God's Law?

Matthew 23:4, 13 = *You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces*

How did Jesus graphically point out how the Pharisees' detailed rules missed the main purpose?

Matthew 23:24 = *You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel* – can't see forest through the trees

For Home Study: Read Matthew 23 for further understanding of how Pharisees were misdirected

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The Lost (Luke 15:1-7)

What major Pharisee rule did Jesus break that led to the parables in Luke 15?

Luke 15:1-2 = *This man welcomes sinners and eats with them* (meals built fellowship)

Why was this so bad in the eyes of the Pharisees?

Psalm 1:1 = Pharisees taught that God hates sinners, avoids them and enjoys their demise

What had the Pharisees missed about God's relationship with sinners?

Ezekiel 18:23 = God is pleased when the wicked repent, not when they die

How did Jesus reply to the Pharisees' rebuke of His association with sinners?

Luke 15:3-6 = Told parable about leaving 99 sheep to find the lost one

What does a lost sheep have to do with a sinner?

Luke 15:7 = God wants sinners to return like a shepherd wants a lost sheep to return

Would a studied Pharisee recognize this connection?

Ezekiel 34:11-12 = *I myself will search for my sheep ... I will rescue them*

The Search (Luke 15:8-10)

Did Jesus feel that the one parable was enough to get the Pharisees to understand?

Luke 15:8-9 = No, He tells another parable about searching for a lost coin

NOTES: It would take months for a Palestinian woman to save ten drachmas

The coins were most likely her dowry and were worn on a string as a necklace

How intently would she look and how much would she rejoice upon finding it?

What does searching for a lost coin have to do with searching for lost sinners?

Luke 15:10 = The search is as intent and the rejoicing is as great

The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-19)

Were these two parables enough for the Pharisees to see God's desire to restore the lost sinner?

Luke 15:11-12 = No, Jesus went on with another parable about two sons

What did the younger son get as his share of the estate?

Deuteronomy 21:17 = One third of everything (Oldest got double share)

How responsible was the son with his inheritance?

Luke 15:13-14 = He squandered everything in wild living

How responsible had Israel been with her inheritance?

Jeremiah 16:18 = They despised and defiled it with idols, etc.

How bad did the son's situation become after he ran out of money?

Luke 15:15-16 = Resorted to feeding pigs and longing to eat their fodder (carob pods)

Why was this considered by Jews to be the lowest depth to which he could sink?

Leviticus 11:7-8 = The pig was very unclean, not even to be touched

How bad did Israel's situation become after her rebellious living?

Lamentations 1:18, 20 = *I rebelled against His command ... have gone into exile ... in torment*

What did the son decide after coming to his senses?

Luke 15:17-19 = Return to his father, confess his sin, ask to be a servant

What did Israel decide after coming to her senses?

Lamentations 3:40-42; 5:21 = Return to the Father, confess sins, ask to be restored

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The Forgiving Father (*Luke 15:20-24*)

How was the son received after returning from squandering a third of his father's estate?

Luke 15:20 = With great love for a missed one; Father ran as fast as he could

What kind of reception can we expect after returning from squandering what our Father gives us?

Romans 8:38-39 = Nothing can separate us from the unmatched love of God

Did the father accept the son's application for employment? = (Servants didn't wear sandals)

Luke 15:21-22 = No, restored to full sonship (Robe - birthright, signet ring - authority)

Will God restore us to sonship if we return to Him, or will He continue to reject us as we rejected Him?

Romans 9:26 = He accepts and loves us as His children

Was the father thinking of ways for the son to repay his evil?

Luke 15:23-24 = No, he gave immediate and full forgiveness and celebrated return

Does God, our Father, have ways for us to repay our evil?

Micah 7:18-19 = No, he gives immediate and full forgiveness and delights in mercy

Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; 55:7 = God throws away our sins and calls for our return

The Faithful Son (*Luke 15:25-32*)

How did the faithful and reliable older brother feel about the return of his brother?

Luke 15:25-30 = Jealous of undeserved love given to *this son of yours*

Did the early Christians better understand God's grace and mercy to the penitent?

Acts 11:1-3 = No, they criticized Peter for associating with Gentiles

How did they respond when they learned that God had accepted the Gentiles also as His sons?

Acts 11:17-18 = They praised God for His forgiveness and mercy to all people

If those who stray are freely taken back, isn't it unfair for those who remain faithful?

Luke 15:31 = The faithful are blessed with God's presence and blessings

How does the father in the parable summarize Jesus' key point of Luke 15?

Luke 15:32 = God celebrates and is glad when a lost and dead son is found and alive

Why didn't Jesus complete the story with how the elder brother responded?

Matthew 12:30 = It was up to the Pharisees to determine how they would respond

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When have I demanded, pushed for or taken for granted something that was really a gift?
(*Luke 15:12; 17:10-19; Proverbs 30:15a; Romans 1:21-23; 2 Timothy 3:1-5*)
2. What have I squandered that was costly to others?
(*Luke 15:13; 16:1; Jeremiah 16:18; Matthew 7:6*)
3. What times of despair or trouble in my life resulted from my own selfish actions?
(*Luke 15:14-16; Romans 2:8-9; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Philippians 2:3-4; James 3:14-16*)
4. How often and in what ways do I show God's unconditional love to someone else?
(*Luke 15:17-27; 6:27-36; Genesis 45:4-5, 14-15; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3:16-18*)
5. When have I been jealous of love or mercy given to someone else?
(*Luke 15:28-32; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Jonah 3:1-2; 3:10-4:3; Matthew 20:1-16; John 21:18-23*)