

LUKE—WEEK 19

THE CLASSIC PARABLES



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is The Prodigal Son among the Pigs by Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–1669) on display at the British Museum, London

Jesus uses parables to teach things His listeners don't want to hear.

Forget the status thing. You must count the cost for following Him—even hating your father and mother. We don't celebrate the way we should either. Like the prodigal son, we chase the wrong things.

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T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

Luke 14:12–15:20 — The Classic Parables
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1 Luke 14:12–14 (ESV)

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

This is a continuation of the previous two paragraphs. Jesus is still dining at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. Previously, Jesus healed *a man before him who had dropsy* and taught a lesson about healing on the Sabbath. Then He told a parable about *how they chose the places of honor* and used it to teach a lesson about pride.

Now He’s extending that lesson to a big banquet. Their pride doesn’t just dominate where they sit when dining. It also dominates the thinking of the guy at the head of the table—the host. Their banquets are all about social status. They invite the “right” people so that they will, in turn, be invited to the “right” parties.

This time Jesus doesn’t light into the Pharisees. He simply suggests that, *“When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”*

They need an Ebenezer Scrooge-style change of heart.

Ouch. This hits a little too close to home. This kind of thinking is so widespread in America it’s almost comforting to learn we didn’t invent it. Pride in social status reaches its pinnacle in America, especially in Hollywood and Washington.

Yogi Berra mocked this perfectly when he said, “Always go to other people’s funerals. Otherwise, they won’t go to yours.”

We’re all infected with the same disease. I catch myself name-dropping way too often. I suppose there are worse sins, but I doubt there are many uglier ones.

We need a Scrooge-style change of heart too. We’re just like the Pharisees.

Okay, maybe we’re not as bad as the Pharisees, but we’re bad in the same way. America is all about status. We’ve been marinating in this culture so long we don’t even notice how pervasive it is.

Think not? Consider the commercials for cars. They almost never have anything to do with transporting you (or your things). They’re about status.

We need a great awakening.

2 Luke 14:15–24 (ESV)

When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

Notice how the people invited to the banquet give ridiculous excuses for why they can’t come. That’s the point. They were invited some time ago; they had plenty of time to schedule things.

They’re not coming because they don’t want to come. Their excuses are lame.

Note also that this parable is a response to another guest saying, “*Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!*” This isn’t about just any old banquet; it’s about **the** banquet.

Thus, this parable has a surprising and creepy message. People are too busy and self-absorbed to accept an invitation to heaven. The invitation will not be repeated, and they will be locked out.

But remember the question in Chapter 13, “*Will those who are saved be few?*” This parable speaks volumes to that. The banquet will be big enough to accept everyone who is willing to come. If *those who are saved* end up being few, it won’t be for limited space.

Jesus is, once again, trying to get their attention with a shocking metaphor. Their perspective is totally wrong.

As long as they’re comfortable, they’re not ripe for an attitude adjustment.

People who are comfortable are hard to reach. If you don’t have a problem, you don’t turn to God. This is the flip side of, “There are no atheists in foxholes.”

This principle applies to Christians too. We need to learn, over and over, that we can’t depend on ourselves; we have to depend on God. Unfortunately, this lesson can be painful and expensive.

This leads to a bold prayer—that God would teach us to depend on Him more. We can hope that this lesson won’t be painful, but if we’re serious, we have to be open to however the Lord chooses to teach us.

It’s that important.

3 Luke 14:25–35 (ESV)

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

The Greek word for “hate” in verse 26 is μισέω (miseō). Yes, it does mean hate, and the vast majority of English Bibles translate it as “hate.” However, this is to be understood in a comparative sense. Thus, some Bibles translate this passage as, “does not love me more than his own father . . .” The Bibles that do translate it as “hate” often footnote the comparative sense. Conversely, those that don’t often say, “literally, hate” in a footnote.

In other words, “hate” here doesn’t have the distilled anger sense that it has in modern usage. For example, consider how we are supposed to not love money. If we do not love money at all, then we hate money in the sense it is used here.

But *miseo* can mean hate in the modern sense too. The play on words is intended and, as usual, Jesus is trying to shock folks into paying attention.

The end of verse 26 really gels this. The Greek that’s translated as “cannot be my disciple” really means “is unable to be my disciple.” It’s not that they’d be disallowed; it’s that they couldn’t cut it.

Jesus can’t say it any plainer than this—being a Christian requires total commitment. It costs you everything.

The rest of the passage is a collection of illustrations of counting the cost.

Christians living in the Middle East right now don’t need to be reminded about counting the cost of following Christ. They live it every day. Please pray for them.

Their situation is so scary that the usual prayers don’t even seem to fit. Yes, we should ask God to bless them and protect them, but the spiritual warfare is where the real action lies. Ask the Lord to bring great forces to bear on this conflict. Ask Him to bring victory and peace.

And most of all, ask the Lord to comfort and encourage His people.

4 Luke 15:1–10 (ESV)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

One of the mistakes people make when they read the Bible is that they skip over troubling passages. When they encounter a passage they don’t like, or don’t agree with, or don’t understand, they avert their eyes. They move on to another passage and forget about the one they don’t want to face. Thus, they miss some of the best lessons.

This is one of those passages. The problem here is that a normal shepherd would never *leave the ninety-nine in the open country* to look for a lost sheep. He would at least have someone else look after his flock while he went looking for the missing sheep.

Next, Jesus said, *“What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors?”* I might look hard for the coin, but I’m not calling anyone when I find it.

So, in a sense, these parables don’t work; they’re over the top. There’s something about heaven that’s strange to us. Then there’s, *“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* Figure this out and you’ve learned a lot.

The connection between these three passages is the number “one.” Jesus’s point is about heaven’s attitude toward individuals.

A single lost soul is important.

I never cease to be amazed that God hears my prayers. It’s not just that I don’t know what I’m praying about—and may even be asking for the wrong thing—but that I’m just one of millions of people praying at the same time. God caring about me individually seems impossible. Yet, in a way I cannot fully fathom, He cares about details and small things.

Then I said, “O Lord GOD, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” — Amos 7:5 (ESV)

5 Luke 15:11–20 (ESV) (part one of a four part series)

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

The father seems to have gotten this all along. The son was *still a long way off* when *his father saw him and felt compassion*. If he had been clueless, he wouldn’t have felt compassion until the son was close enough that he could see what a mess he was in.

It’s a parable, so we can’t puzzle through what actually happened. The point is to understand the picture Jesus is painting here. The father in this story seems to be completely unsurprised by his son’s *reckless* (i.e., prodigal) living. It’s as if he gave the inheritance to his son and then let him leave, knowing that he would blow it all.

This makes perfect sense as the father in this parable is analogous to our heavenly Father (who knows how everything is going to pan out). A father should know how his son thinks anyway.

Now this is just the set-up for the main lesson, which we will get to next, but this has something to say on its own. The son’s sin is “usual, customary and reasonable.” It seems pretty extreme and depressing to the casual reader, but it’s not really.

The father’s plan is brilliant. He could have just had his son memorize all the right things about his sinful nature, but then the kid wouldn’t have really learned the lesson.

Now he has.

This explains a lot of God’s lessons. Sometimes, memorizing correct doctrine isn’t enough. To complete the lesson, we need to experience it.

Unfortunately, that kind of teaching often involves pain. In fact, our unwillingness to admit we’re wrong makes us very slow learners in this arena.

So, we get hammered. Praise God for that.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How are you infected with this “quest for status” mentality? What do you do to compensate?
2. Are you too self-sufficient? Do you need to learn to depend on God more?
3. Is being a Christian costing you anything? Has it in the past?
4. In what way does being a Christian give you joy?
5. What painful lessons has God taught you?