

DECODING THE PARABLES - Lesson 7



MAXIM: Often the key to a parable is in the front door.

In terms of the parables, the student of Scripture needs to be reminded of the above maxim. The key lies in the preamble and theme of the content or narrative.

THE LOST SHEEP, LOST COIN AND LOST SON

Luke 15:1-2 *"Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."*

The Pharisees were religious but cold, lacking in compassion and sensitivity. Jesus as the Messiah seeks to teach the critical Pharisees that He came for sinners and publicans (despised tax collectors). A publican was a Jew working for Rome to collect taxes from his own people.

The three parables are similar but each one carries a different lesson. If the intent was simply to teach the importance of saving the lost, then only one of the three parables would have adequately illustrated the point.

The primary message is to reach the lost sheep of Israel.

Matthew 10:5-6 *"These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

The Pharisees were more interested in their legal ritualistic practises than in the lost souls of Israel. Isaiah 53:6 illustrates the condition of Israel. In a secondary sense all mankind is lost without Christ as Saviour.

Isaiah 53:6 *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."*

1. THE LOST SHEEP – ONE OUT OF A HUNDRED = 1%

Luke 15:3-7 *"So He spoke this parable to them, saying: "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? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I 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."*

Why all the rejoicing about one sinner being found and saved? Jesus came to save the lost, just as the shepherd gives his life for the sheep. Why not rejoice for the ninety-nine that were saved? Because the ninety-nine had already been celebrated when each one was saved.

The friends and neighbours rejoiced with the Shepherd just as the angels rejoice with the Saviour when one sinner repents. The Pharisees needed to recognise the joy of seeing sinners saved instead of despising the efforts of the Good Shepherd to save those who were lost.

2. THE LOST COIN – ONE OUT OF TEN = 10%

Luke 15:8-9 "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? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbours together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!'"

The shepherd finding the sheep symbolises tenderness and loving care. The Pharisees showed disregard for the lost and lacked compassion. The lost coin demonstrates earnestness and conscientiousness in finding the lost. The women of that time wore a frontlet around their brow or a necklace called a *semedi*. The coins were not of monetary value but marital value (equivalent to an engagement ring today.) A woman in those days wore their dowry and this indicated the value and worth that her husband had placed on her. Jesus as the Messiah was diligent to find the lost because of their value and worth to the Kingdom promise. If this jewellery was lost or broken it indicated that the woman was irresponsible or even unfaithful. The woman had a right to rejoice when she found the missing coin and likewise, how much more should the Messiah rejoice for a soul who was once lost being found?

3. THE LOST SON – ONE OUT OF TWO = 50%

The story of the prodigal son is told in Luke 15:11-24. It is one of the most beautiful human stories ever told, the pearl of parables. It is the gospel in a nutshell. Charles Dickens described it as the best short story ever told. Restoration and life is restored to a wilfully disobedient son who repents and comes home. The parable denotes three states:

- Rejection of home
- Returning to home
- Reception at home

Lost Israel had forsaken their heritage – they squandered their inheritance and they lived with the unclean (swine). Israel was exiled among Gentile nations in bondage and slavery. According to ancient Jewish laws of inheritance, if there were two sons the older would receive two thirds and the younger, one third of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). The compassion of the father in the parable exposed the Pharisees who were stoic, cold and disinterested in sinners, lacking compassion. Indeed the older brother's attitude resembled the cold and insensitive hearts of the Pharisees self-righteousness. The father ran to meet the boy whose hurting feet, ragged clothes, hungry and thirsty soul had been weakened on the road back home. The father met him half way. This is a beautiful thought in terms of God the Father meeting sinful humanity half way, as He allowed His Son to leave the heavenlies to come to earth to be suspended on a cross?

CONCLUSION

We can **apply** features represented in the three parables, of the triune God of the Bible:

- The Lost Sheep – Jesus as the Son of God came to seek the lost.
- The Lost Coin- The Holy Spirit like the woman, diligently searches for the lost.
- The Lost Son – God the Father longs lovingly for the return of His sons and daughters.

