

A Different Take on the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Introduction

Jesus never gave titles to the parables he spoke, Christians have done that. His parables were Kingdom teaching in the form of stories for the uninitiated, but food for those who were being taught by Father. Jesus fully explained this to his disciples on one occasion:

Matthew 13:10-17 (NIV) – *The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’¹ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”*

It's important to get the principle that's behind his explanation as it's difficult to appreciate: Those with ‘hard hearts’ are resisted by the Kingdom. This is related to a Kingdom principle we've learnt in recent times:

Rest is required to allow faith to activate things so they happen²

Operating out of rest is the key to functioning in the Kingdom. Without it, the Kingdom does not open up its ‘treasures’.

The Parable

The parable of ‘The Prodigal Son’³ is part of a discourse by Jesus where he taught his disciples about numerous facets of the Kingdom using the picture language of parables to get it across in everyday language that they were able to grasp. The Kingdom is so different to life in the natural and so completely different to religion that a simplistic teaching style was required for those who listened as they were steeped in Judaism or Samaritanism.

Unlike the parable of “The Sower”⁴ which Jesus explained as being about receiving the message of the Kingdom⁵ (NOT the gospel of salvation), this one was not explained. We are therefore left to interpret it for ourselves – a ‘dangerous’ thing to do. In this regard, the teaching I've heard in 50 years of listening to pulpit teaching where it was used to reaffirm that God forgives our worst sins. It has also been used as a tool for evangelism where Father God forgives our sin (i.e. our prodigal lifestyle) and welcomes us home. These, however, don't look at the purpose Jesus told it to his hearers back then, prior to his crucifixion which was the introduction of the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Jesus messages through parables addressed some complex kingdom issues, not just the warm and fuzzy ones we hear from the pulpit. One of the BIG issues was the coming of the Kingdom which would bring about the replacement of national Israel with Spiritual Israel and the shift to the New Covenant (NC) that would be set in place with Jesus's blood. The parables of ‘The Wedding Feast’⁶, ‘The Wicked Vinedressers’⁷, ‘The Minas’⁸, all advised the disciples, in hidden language, that this shift was going to

1 – Isaiah 6:9,10

2 – Read: “Faith is Leaning, Not Pushing” canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Faith-is-Leaning-Not-Pushing.pdf

3 – Luke 15:11-32 (Also known as the parable of ‘the Two Brothers’, ‘the Lost Son’, ‘the Loving Father’ or ‘the Forgiving Father’)

4 – Matthew 13:1-23

5 – Matthew 13:19 (See NIV, TPT, CJB, CEV, EXB, GNT, PHILLIPS translations)

6 – Matthew 22:1-14

7 – Matthew 21:33-46

8 – Luke 19:11-27

happen. The parable of ‘The Prodigal Son’ can be seen as one of these heralds of the ‘changing of the guard’.

The Pharisees knew that these parables were about the Kingdom being taken from them and they didn’t like it:

Matthew 21:43-46 (NKJV) – *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”* Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived⁹ that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

On other occasions Jesus told them straight out that destruction was coming their way.¹⁰ But, they had their pride: “We have Abraham as our father”¹¹. This made them into a stiff-necked people¹² because they wouldn’t budge from their heritage and embrace the New thing God was doing.

So what was Jesus’ point with the parable of ‘The Prodigal son’?

NOTE: Before answering that, an important thing to know is this: The word ‘prodigal’ means ‘a person who spends money in a recklessly extravagant way’. In the parable the son is said to have wasted his money on riotous living. There is no hint that what he did was very sinful or evil – that’s been read into it.

My interpretation which I provide here was given to me this morning as a revelation and it has unfolded as I thought about it on my walk.

Here are the characters in the story:

FATHER = Father God

LOST SON = Gentiles

JEALOUS SON = Jews

Background

To understand the reason for the parable, you’ll need to know some cosmological history. The background information comes from way back to Noah’s time after the flood. This is the location of the hidden kernel inside the story, but it will still require you to have a Deuteronomy 32 worldview¹³ to appreciate it. Here’s a summary of the background to the parable:

*“[I]n Deuteronomy 32:8-9, the “Most High” had disinherited the nations of the world, assigned them to the dominion of supernatural sons of God, and then created Israel as its own inheritance from nothing. Those sons of God rebelled and became corrupt (Psalm 82:1-4), throwing God’s order into chaos (Psalm 82:1-5).”*¹⁴

There’s the detail of the background:

“The famous story of the building of the Tower of Babel is about much more than an ill-fated construction project and language confusion. The episode is at the heart of the Old Testament worldview. It was at Babylon where people sought to “make a name (shem) for themselves” by building a tower that reached to the heavens, the realm of the gods. The city is once again cast as the source of sinister activity and knowledge¹⁵ ...

It’s at this point that most Bible readers presume there’s nothing more to think about. That’s because other

9 – ‘Knew’

10 – Matthew 3:7

11 – Matthew 3:9 This was a common thing for Jews to stand on (John 8:33)

12 – Acts 7:51 (Exodus 32:9)

13 – Michael Heiser (2015) “The Unseen Realm” p:76 [e-book]

14 – Michael Heiser (2017) “Reversing Hermon” p:145 [e-book]

15 – See Genesis 11:1-9

of the world's nations were no longer going to be in relationship to him. He would begin anew. He would enter into covenant relationship with a new people that did not yet exist: Israel.

The implications of this decision and this passage are crucial to understanding much of what's in the Old Testament..."

So what happened to the other nations? What does it mean that they were apportioned as an inheritance according to the number of the sons of God?

*As odd as it sounds, the rest of the nations were placed under the authority of members of Yahweh's divine council. The other nations were assigned to lesser elohim as a judgment from the Most High, Yahweh..."*²⁰

NOTE: The number 70 is exactly the number of the sons of El in the divine council at Ugarit. This is part of the corrupted cosmology resident in the Semitic peoples of Canaan. El was the chief God in their pantheon. *El* in Hebrew is used for the God of Israel and for other gods, in both singular and plural. The title 'El' is used in *El Shaddai*, *El Ro'i*, *El 'Elyon* and *El 'Olam*. "The Sons of God"²¹ have the group title *elohim*, which is used in Hebrew for 'little' gods. Can you see the connection now.

"Deuteronomy 4:19-20 is the other side of God's punitive coin. Whereas in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 God apportioned or handed out the nations to the sons of God, here we are told God "allotted" the gods to those nations. God decreed, in the wake of Babel, that the other nations he had forsaken would have other gods besides himself to worship. It is as though God was saying, "If you don't want to obey me, I'm not interested in being your god—I'll match you up with some other god." Psalm 82, where we started our divine council discussion, echoes this decision. That psalm has Yahweh judging other elohim, sons of the Most High, for their corruption in administering the nations. The psalm ends with the psalmist pleading, "Rise up, O God, judge the earth, because you shall inherit all the nations."

*It might seem that God's response at the tower of Babel incident was overly severe. But consider the context. The point is not that Yahweh was a glorified building inspector."*²²

NOTE: If you are interested, there's a descriptions of the eschatological judgement of the disinherited nations in scripture,²³ as is the fate of their divine overlords²⁴.

Parable's Interpretation

Here's the understanding I received today.

Jesus was introducing his hearers to the return of the nations into God's family again. This would be accomplished under the NC of the Kingdom and it would realise Father's desire to have his 'kids' back. We know he entrusted the Israelites with the responsibility of being the model of how God's people were to live and also a light to the nations so they would join in. In this they were a monumental failure. Their failures resulted in them being taken captive by the Assyrians, when 10 of their tribes were lost from the nation, and then again by the Babylonians. What Jesus was informing them here was that it was about to happen for a third time – permanently. Like the failure of the nations to serve him and failure of the *elohim* to supervise those nations, the time had come for the perfect solution.

Under the NC that Jesus would instigate, the gentiles, who originally chose not to serve God and gave up their allegiance to him to run their lives the way they wanted, would now see their state and decide to return. This would occur, one individual at a time, rather than nationally. This was because it would be a personal spiritual decision based on a heart attitude. Why? Because God's interested in the heart,²⁵ not the actions.

20 – Michael Heiser (2015) "The Unseen Realm" p:74-75 [e-book]

21 – Deuteronomy 32:8

22 – Michael Heiser (2015) "The Unseen Realm" p:76 [e-book]

23 – Zephaniah 1:14-18; 2:4-15; Amos 1:13-15; Joel 3:11-12; Micah 5:15 (A point made by Heiser in "Reversing Hermon" p:428 [e-book])

24 – Isaiah 34:1-4; Psalm 82 (A point made by Heiser in "Reversing Hermon" p:428 [e-book])

25 – 1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 15:8 (Matthew 18:35; Luke 16:15; Acts 8:21-22)

When they came to Father and repented (changed their mind and apologised) he would immediately restore them. This is highlighted by putting a new cloak and sandals on his son straight away, without delay or any hesitation. The cloak and shoes were symbols of the son's restored status of importance in the scheme of things. In Jesus' time a person wore clothes that signified who they were, their status. Father had been waiting and longing for the return of his lost sons (in the lost nations) and will overjoyed at their return. The return to sonship is identified by the placing of a ring on the son's finger. This was no ordinary ring which designated his nobility. It was a signet ring, the family ring which only sons wore, not servants or rejected sons.

The son who never left, the Jews, were going about their business as sons having not deserted Father's business. However, their hearts were wrong, they had bad attitudes. They would become jealous of Father's acceptance of the returning gentiles and complain, saying they deserved all the blessings because they stuck in the family.

Implication

Standard Christian evangelism works on fear and promise. The fear is of going to Hell (a word not used in the original Greek²⁶) and of missing out on the promise of paradise²⁷. In the Kingdom, this is not how evangelism is done. This is the 'pointy bit' that the parable of 'The Prodigal Son' brings out.

Every person is born separated from Father, no longer in his family because of The Fall. We all have a need to get back to where Adam originally was, in the garden (paradise) east of Eden. It's built into us – we're not home, we're lost. We need to be with our daddy and we know we won't be complete until we are.

The NC made a way for every Jew and every gentile to come back to Father and be reinstated as a fully-fledged son, without past baggage or loss of privilege. This is the hidden message of the parable.

Notice that the son asked for forgiveness for his waywardness and received it straight away and was immediately restored. This is because his father's heart had already done it – it just needed to be transacted in the natural.

Once back, the 'lost son' now has all the benefits of father's household, nothing was withheld from him because he had rejected his father's wishes. These were the benefits the son was looking for: "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired men have food enough and to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father'²⁸. Unbeknown to him, his father was wanting to restore him and look after his needs.

This is the key to Kingdom evangelism. This is the **good news** (gospel) of the Kingdom. It's what we're supposed to be spreading the message about, just like Jesus did.

Importantly, for this message to be received, they have to recognise that they are missing out on what Father has for them. Until that time they will be satisfied with their lot in life.

So, what is our good news that we present to others?

READ "Kingdom Evangelism" for the details of our good news
canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Kingdom-Evangelism.pdf

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26 – Check out my investigation: "Is there a Hell?" canberraforerunners.org/?page_id=6853#hell

27 – This word is definitely in the Greek: 'paradisos'. A garden or park. (See Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7)

28 – Luke 15:17-18a (The Living Bible)