

PARABLE: A SOURCE OF HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

In Luke 15:1-2, we read about the Pharisees grumbling over the fact that Jesus was receiving sinners and eating with them. Interestingly, the Pharisees had a strong aversion towards sinners, but not towards themselves as sinners too! Before starting on the three parables that Jesus told in response to the Pharisees' complaint, there is already an important lesson all Christians can learn right at the beginning of Luke Chapter 15 if they do not wish to earn any rebuke from the Lord: We are not to be self-righteous like the Pharisees!

It can be irksome when encountering "Pharisees". This said, I must confess that I am not infallible; there are times when I veer towards judgmentalism against others but not myself. Each time, I must quickly seek God's forgiveness and correct myself to be gracious towards others just as I bask in God's graciousness.

Parables are not just simple stories to entertain listeners.

They are stories with a serious message – in fact, a parable may contain multiple messages – that reveals "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" only to targeted listeners rather than to everyone. (Mt 13:10-15)

Therefore, when different persons listen to the same parable, they are often able to uncover variously the messages "hidden within". As an example, let's look at the case of the three parables recounted in Luke 15:

- 1) Parable of the Lost Sheep
- 2) Parable of the Lost Coin"
- 3) Parable of the Lost Son

The 1st parable, some see it in the positive sense about our Heavenly Father's concern for His lost sinners; others see in it the negative sense of Jesus rebuking the self-righteousness of the sinning Pharisees.

In the 3rd parable, the word "son" and related pronouns referring to the lost younger son appear overwhelmingly in the passage as compared to similar words referring to the elder brother. The immediate understanding of the message by the hearers, especially when considering the 3 parables together, is justifiably about our Father in heaven rejoicing over one sinner who repents.



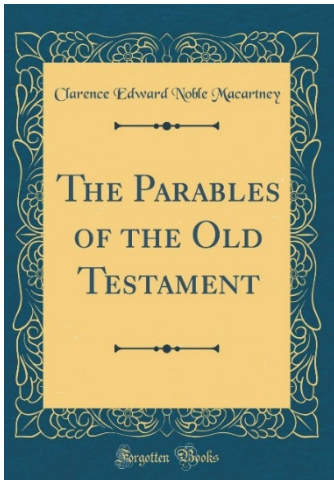
This is a consistent point in all 3 parables:

- Lost Sheep – “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (v15:7)
- Lost Coin – “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (v15:10)
- Lost Son – “But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (v15:32)



The 3rd parable has been regarded by many as being the longest and one of the most evocative parables in the whole Bible. Apart from the message on repentance for running away from the father (re: the younger son), there are many other important lessons “hiding within”, which I shall explore another time.

Parables are also adopted by God in the OT:



- “My people hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old” — Ps 78:1-2
- “I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them.” — Hosea 12:10
- In 2 Sam 12:1-10, David was rebuked by a parable. (Ouch! What a bombshell.)

Parables are a rich source of knowledge that God gives to believers but keeps veiled to those whose heart has become calloused (Mt 13:11,15). In Bible studies, it is good to pay

attention to the parables.

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