

Episode: Luke Series No. 15

Narrator: Lazarus the Beggar

Primary Scriptures: Luke 15, 16

Story Summary: Some parables of Jesus

Location: Galilee and Judea

Time: Circa 30 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Luke 15:7, 15:10, 15:20, 16:10-11, 16:13

A Biblical parable is a short story designed to illustrate a spiritual truth. Many people believe Jesus invented parables, but many hundreds of years before, proverbs were used in the books of *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ezekiel*, and *Hosea*. In fact, Matthew wrote that at least one of the Old Testament verses was a prophecy that Jesus would speak in parables.¹

It appears that Jesus taught the crowds in parables because they could remember and understand them as they had time to reflect on them and discuss them. After telling parables to the crowd, Jesus would often later explain them in detail to his apostles. These explanations are recorded in the Bible and help us clearly understand what Jesus was trying to teach.

Because of their ancient, Middle East context, many of Jesus' parables are difficult for modern Westerners to understand. An example of this was driven home to a group of Christian tourists in Israel as they toured the ruins of the town of Chorazin, a place Jesus did many miracles.² The group leader told Jesus' parable of the woman who lost a silver coin and had to search her house for it. He first said he had always misunderstood the parable because he was used to smooth American floors, then told the crowd he had dropped ten coins on the very rough rock floor beneath their feet. The entire group could find only five of the coins.

Luke is also the only Gospel writer to tell the story of the Lost Son, sometimes known as the Prodigal Son. As you read this story, remember that the original listeners would have been shocked that both sons treated their father with such disrespect. In that culture, he should have disinherited both sons instead of treating them with love and mercy. This would have surely challenged the listeners' minds about the nature of God.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is told only in *Luke*. As you listen to the story, remember that in none of his other parables did Jesus use proper names. In this story, Jesus gives Lazarus as the name of the beggar. This has caused many people to interpret this event not as a parable but as an historical event. Jesus' wording about the afterlife in this story has been interpreted in many ways. Some take it to be entirely figurative, others entirely literally, and many others somewhere in between.

¹ Matthew 13:34-35

² Matthew 11:21

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Jesus speak to the crowds using parables? [they could remember the stories and reflect on them until they understood them.]
 2. It is highly unlikely that you have been a shepherd of sheep. How might that impact your understanding of the shepherd who lost one of his hundred sheep? Is it likely that a shepherd would have had one hundred sheep? How hard is it to lose a sheep?
 3. What, if anything, do you think Jesus was trying to teach about Heaven and Hell in the story of Lazarus the beggar?
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1. They could remember the stories and reflect on them until they understood them.

Application Questions:

1. The Pharisees were not known for being rich, but according to Luke 16:14, they were lovers of money. In your experience, who loves money more...rich people or middle-class people? Regardless of your social class, what can you do to bring your view of money more in line with that of Jesus?
2. Luke 16:13 is a famous verse. Jesus says that no person can serve God and money, since you can only have one master. In your daily life, how would somebody know which one you are serving? Proverbs 22:7 says a borrower is slave to the lender. Could being in debt hinder your relationship to God?
3. Luke 16:31 indicates that some people cannot be convinced of the truth of the Scriptures even if someone rises from the dead. What did it take, or will it take, for you to become convinced?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Luke 16:13 indicates you cannot be devoted to money and to God. What will that mean to you in the next two years of your life? What other things may steal your devotion to God?
2. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, are you more like the brother who left home or the brother who stayed? Do you ever do the right thing with the wrong attitude?
3. In the story of Lazarus the beggar, the rich man was too wrapped up in his high standard of living to pay attention of more important things. What are you neglecting in order to have a higher standard of living?