

The Summer 2022

Over the summer months there is a quieter period, and most groups pause during the month of August. These notes are quite light – so please look over pervious study notes to get insight into ideas for icebreakers and worship. These can be found on:

<https://www.christchurchw4.com/study>

The two books related to this series are: Jacob & the Prodigal by Kenneth E. Bailey and Prodigal God by Timothy Keller.

The Prodigal Series:

Week 1: Jacob & The Prodigal

Read Genesis 27

Bailey in his Book: Jacob & the Prodigal compares Genesis 27–35 with the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. He gives us fresh insight into the parable in a wider Jewish context and shows us how God’s grace is weaved throughout scripture. Bailey notes 51 points of comparison and contrast and here they are:

Dramatic material that appears in each account in nearly the same way.	Dramatic material that appears in each account where the reuse in the parable shows some significant revision,	Dramatic material that appears in both stories but is reversed or radically changed as it reappears in the parable.
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A father & two sons	The death of the father	The nature of the father
The need for haste	Younger son breaks relationship with father	The mother
Estrangement	Identity of two sons	To burn or not to burn the bridges
Rebellious younger son in far country (exile & return)	Nature of the blessing/inheritance	Community in the far country
Older son stays at home (off stage)	Deception & betrayal	Success vs failure in the far country
Fear on the eve of return	Honourable vs dishonourable animal husbandry	Divine visitation/incarnation
Lack of remorse	Direction & purpose of return	The family agent
Run, fall on neck, kiss	The manipulative speech	Reconciliation with the father
Characteristics of two sons	Location of meeting with returning son	The retainers and the motive of the family agent
Older son comes in from field	Salvation/repentance	The kiss
A young goat for a meal	Youngers son's return & question of safety/peace	Gifts on return

The identity of the remembering community	On arrival at the house both older sons face 'injustice'	Dressed in the best robe
	Older son becomes angry	The promise of land
	Angry/aggressive speech	The hero of the story
	Reconciliation with older brother	Costly love
		Father responds to his angry son
		"All that you see is mine" vs "All that is mine is yours"
		A banquet celebration
		Joy
		The evolution of the symbol of the father to a symbol of Jesus
		The two sons & the intended listeners/readers
		The Gentiles
		The ending: present or missing?

If Jesus writes himself into the story as 'The Good Father' what is he saying about himself? And what is he saying about the people Israel?

What stood out to you from the teaching on Sunday?

One of the differences between the stories is how sin is defined. In the story of the prodigal the son wants his father dead and on the deepest level sinners want God dead. The prodigal causes a radical break in relationship with his Father – Jesus is telling us that is how we are to define sin? Is that how you define sin? What things break your relationship with Father God?

The prodigal moves away from God with no thought of return. In what ways do sin lead us to do the same today and how do we see that? The prodigal widens the gap between himself and the father and then things spiral – have you any examples when you have sin spiralling until you hit rock bottom?

Jesus also tells us in this parable that sin is not something that can be solved on our own – how do we see that in the story?

What does Jesus' show us about God by likening him to a Father (and mother)?

The reconciliation in the Jacob story and the Prodigal is very different – what does that highlight to us?

How does the father empty himself twice to his sons?

Jesus takes the story that gave Israel its identity – as the descendants of Jacob and calls them to place their identity in the two sons both that need restoring and can't do it on their own. Instead, they are to understand themselves as those that are loved by the father and are in need of his grace. How well do you understand yourself as someone in need of God's grace? How should this understanding shape us?

Week 2: Lost Sheep & The Prodigal

Read together Luke 15.1-7

As Jesus tells these parables who is he speaking to (verse 1) and why is it significant to remember that?

What is Jesus being accused of in verse 2? Taking all the teaching in the gospels in what ways are Christians to stay separate from unbelievers and in what ways are we to interact? How are we doing as a church at welcoming people in and eating with them?

What is the key point of this parable?

How does it relate to the lost coin and the lost son?

Jesus begins his “parable of finding the lost (in three scenes)” with the story of the good shepherd and the lost sheep.¹ The parable exhibits a rhetorical structure, illustrated in figure 3.

1. <i>What man</i> of <i>you</i> , having a hundred sheep,	YOU
2. and having lost <i>one</i> of them,	ONE
3. does not leave the <i>ninety-nine</i> in the wilderness,	NINETY-NINE
A. and go after the <i>lost</i> one	LOST
B. until he <i>finds</i> it? And having <i>found</i> it,	FIND
C. he places it upon his shoulders, <i>rejoicing</i> .	REJOICE
D. And coming to <i>the home</i> , he calls to <i>the</i> <i>friends</i> and neighbors,	RESTORE
C'. saying to them, “ <i>Rejoice</i> with me,	REJOICE
B'. because I have <i>found</i> my sheep	FIND
A'. which was <i>lost</i> .”	LOST
4. Even so, I say to <i>you</i> , that thus there will be more <i>joy</i> in heaven	YOU
5. over <i>one</i> sinner who repents	ONE
6. than over <i>ninety-nine</i> righteous persons who need no repentance.	NINETY-NINE

Figure 3. The lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7)

¹This chapter is revised and expanded from K. E. Bailey, *Finding*, pp. 54-92.

It was common in the culture to tell stories and poems that have what is called ‘inverted parallelism’ or ‘chiastic structure’ – it is where the central point is the key to the whole thing. What do you learn looking at the above image?

What connection can be made with Psalm 23, Jeremiah 23 & Ezekiel 37?

What can we take from this study? What does it show us about the heart of Jesus’ mission and message? How can we take that into our daily lives?

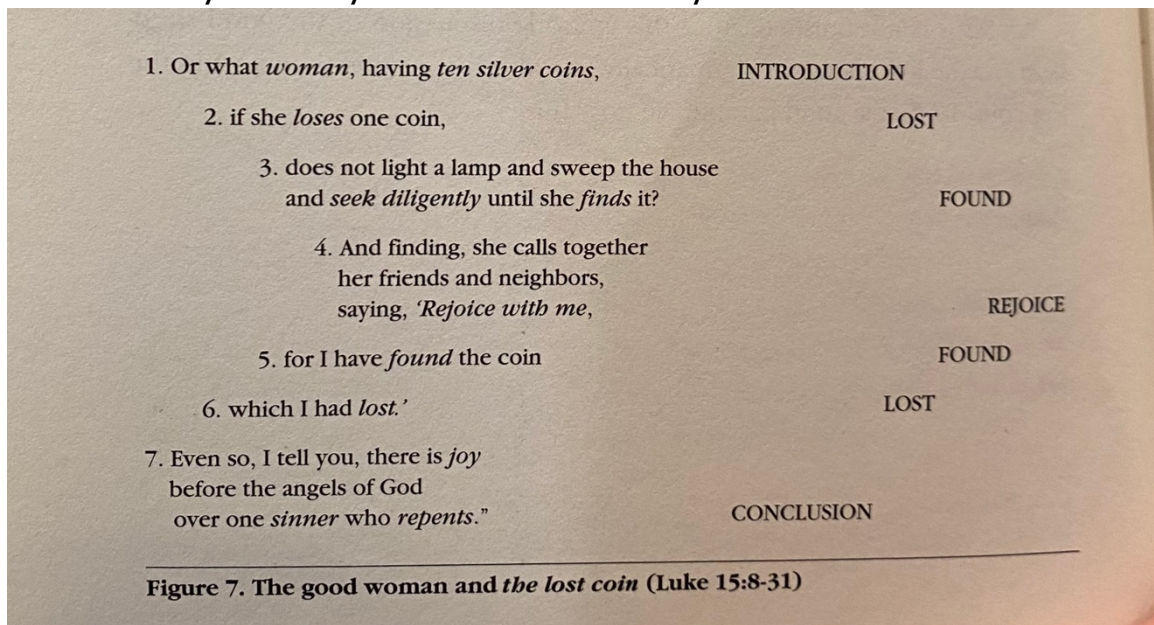
Week 3: Lost Coin & The Prodigal

Read together Luke 15.8-10

Luke 19:10 in what way does this verse link to the parable?

Why does Jesus tell a story about a woman?

What is the meaning of the story, and what does it say that is not already conveyed in the first story?



The coin mentioned is a drachma which went out of circulation in the days of Nero it was a days wages for a working man. The women's ten coins represented a third of a months wages. It is probable she is married and the money is her husband's wages – what does it say about her that she has been trusted by her husband? What echo's are there of Proverbs 31.10-31?

How is this woman different from the shepherd in describing the loss that has happened? Is she more honest than the shepherd?

The coin cannot find itself. The theme of restoration through costly effort is present – what does this teach us about atonement?

The thought of people judging the women for her saving efforts is absurd and so then is the Pharisees reaction to Jesus' saving work. What do you think they heard and understood as they listened to this parable?

Bailey writes this: *If as proposed, Jesus is rewriting the Jacob story, that story contains a father (Isaac) and a mother (Rebekah). Jesus' parable of the prodigal son has no mother. Why? The simple answer is that Jesus elevated the father in his new story from an Oriental patriarch (Isaac) and refashioned him. Into a metaphor for God. Jesus cannot use a double metaphor in one parable without compromising his understanding of the unity of God. If the new story has a mother and a father, then there are two gods, one male and one female. Jesus tells three stories, but each of them has a single central figure. There is one shepherd (not a shepherd and his wife). In like manner there is a one woman (not the woman and her husband). Finally, the father has no wife. The unity of God is preserved, and God who is spirit and neither male nor female is portrayed as having the characteristics of each. This is in harmony with the story of creation where humankind is made in the image of God (Gen 1.27). This text makes it clear that both the male and the female are created in the image of God, and if this is true then the nature of God necessarily encompasses the natures of male and female. The trilogy of stories under consideration is a continuation of this same theology, and the tale of the good woman is a critical part of that larger whole.*

What do we take from that into our understand of God and humans?

What will you apply into your life from this parable?

Week 4: Prodigal God

Read together Luke 15.11-32

How does this parable show that sin is significant, and we all need restoring?

On P. 10 Keller in his book writes, "The targets of this story are not "wayward sinners" but religious people who do everything the Bible requires. Jesus is pleading not so much with immoral outsiders as with moral insiders."

How does the father empty himself to try and restore the younger brother? What do you think happened to the younger brother? Why is the end ambiguous?

In the context, who were the moral insiders? Why was their morality a hindrance to accepting Jesus' teaching in the gospels? How is our own morality sometimes a hindrance in fully trusting Jesus on a daily basis?

Dr. Keller asserts that we may not have a lot of "younger brothers" in our churches because churches are more full of elder brothers than we'd like to think. In your experience, do you think this is right? Has there been any hint of an elder brother attitude at any time in your own Christian life?

Many religious people end up throwing in the towel and pursuing a life of self-discovery (i.e.: a pastor who runs away with his secretary) while others who have lived the younger brother lifestyle for years will turn to religious morality in order to make up for their immorality. Why is neither one of these paths the way to true fulfillment? Which of the two is more subtly dangerous? Why?

Keller says: There are two ways to be your own saviour and Lord, one is by breaking all the moral laws and setting your own course and the other is by keeping all the moral laws and being very, very good. How does the message of the gospel differ from both of these approaches? (P. 45)

Keller says, "To the degree we see the beauty (worth, value, love, etc.) of our true elder brother we will be free from the fear and neediness that creates either younger brothers or elder brothers." Discuss some practical implications of this statement.

As believers in Christ our eternal destiny is the feast of Joy in the Kingdom of our God forever. How should what we believe about the future impact the way we live today?