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Gathered by God, We Live Our Faith With: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy.

Who Is Jesus: Epiphany 2025 Bible Study

Jesus, the storyteller

Opening Premise

Parables are pithy, strange little stories from every day life which are the most distinctive and peculiar aspect of the teaching of Jesus. Jesus uses these unexplained stories to explain God, yet most of these lack neat endings or immediate apparent points.

Naming some beloved parables

What are some parables you can name right off the top of your head?

Why are some parables beloved and others a mystery we still can't seem to unravel?

Why is the difference between a parable that is memorable or one you would rather forget?

How can parables teach new insights when we have heard it preached a certain way for so long?

Read the three parables of Luke 15. what might be the most common way we understand these parables? How might these parables still have us scratching our heads wondering about their meaning?

Three insights

1. understanding of Jesus, faith in Jesus, the ability to figure out what he's talking about and what he's up to, is a gift of God. It's God's revelation, not some personal intellectual achievement.

2. mere understanding of Jesus may not be the point. Parables take you deeper. They are a complex, deep way of thinking about the world.

3. eventually, this sometimes contradictory, conflicted quality of Scripture, which often is so exasperating, may, with time, become beloved. Sometimes, Jesus reaches out for us; sometimes, Jesus pushes away. Jesus is God with us, not God controlled, and tamed by us. Jesus not only spoke in parables; Jesus is a parable.

Closing Thought:

We want the Bible to present clear and concise information about God and about the way we are supposed to live life; with clear answers about who God loves and who God does not. Jesus' parables complicate this approach by not giving us anything clear or concise, but rather puzzles to ponder and discern, and which leaves room for undefined boundaries between God's realm and our own.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, your teaching is sometimes confusing. Send your Spirit into our hearts that we may have a clearer understanding of you and the ways of God's Kingdom in our world. In your holy name we pray. Amen

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3 So he told them this parable: 4 “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

8 “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

11 Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.’ So he divided his assets between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.” ’ 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’ ”