

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

58 – Pushing Parables

Announcements:

2/13 @6:30 -

Men's Discipleship
- Question 7

2/15 @7:00 -

Prayer

2/16 @6:30 -

Grace Group

2/19 @8:30 -

Sunday School

2/21 @6:30 -

Women's

Bible Study

2/26 @5:30 -

Joint Service With
La Luz Bible
Church

ICE BREAKER: Has anyone ever twisted your words?

READ: Matthew 18:23-35

Today we will be talking about a subject that it feels like we have spent quite a few Grace Groups talking about: the proper reading of parables. It seems like every time we cover one there are things about it that people can and have taken to improper places. This parable in particular has been put forward as evidence of two different doctrines that are just not present when this parable is read correctly. I would argue this is because the pictures and words and heart of the parable are all pushed places that this parable was never intended to cover. So today what I would like to do is present the arguments that are made to show how we might engage them and have more rich understanding of what Jesus truly means.

Before we dive into the problems, however, it would be helpful to lay out an assumption that will play heavily into understanding this parable. As Douglas O'Donnell notes: "This is a parable, which means when Jesus says, 'the kingdom of heaven *may be compared to,*' he does not mean that the kingdom is precisely like this. Embellishment and exaggeration are allowed in a parable just as they are in children's fables -- to make a point." In other words, when we read parables we must be careful that we do not boil it down to a wooden literalism, because as we will see this might lead us to a few problems.

DISCUSS: Why is it important that we assume that a parable might have "embellishments and exaggerations"? What dangers might this type of thinking expose us to?

The first doctrine that some people look to this parable to defend is that of purgatory. The basic argument goes like this: The first man was once forgiven, but then because of some sin in his life he finds himself "delivered to the jailers until he should pay all his debt." Thus some people read this and say: Just like this man, through his lack of charity and forgiveness, can find himself in the position wherein he has forgiveness but also must work off his debt, so too might the wayward soul find itself in a position where it has some level of forgiveness but yet there is more work that must be done, "until he pays off his debt." So what should we say to this? First, purgatory is not just NOT biblical, it is ANTI biblical. We rest in the *completed* work of Christ, and any doctrine that causes doubt in that and offers a works based righteousness is wrong. But the real question is, if that is not what the parable is teaching, what lesson can we learn? Here is where noting the context is helpful. Peter was asking a question about forgiveness, Jesus was laying out a parable that was meant to show the seriousness of unforgiveness. Rather than a treatise on the nature of the afterlife, the value of forgiveness is at the center! Forgiven people are forgivers, and woe to you if you cannot or will not forgive!

DISCUSS: Why is it so important we see the main point Jesus is making here? How can we be better forgivers?

The second thought stems from the first one. Of course this is not talking about purgatory some might say, what Jesus is talking about here is much more terrifying, He speaks here of losing your salvation! The initial thought starts in the same place, this man is surely forgiven, but then, because of the sin of unforgiveness, he places in jeopardy that hope. Again we can ask: what response can we have? Here our assumptions can be helpful. We have clear teaching elsewhere in Scripture that those whom Jesus saves he saves to the uttermost (See the parable of the lost sheep right before this, see John 18:9, see the "golden chain of Salvation" in Romans 8:29-30). So when scripture teaches clearly that we cannot lose our salvation, why take a parable that has inherent difficulties to try and prove your doctrine. Instead we can see the heart of Jesus' warnings, and I believe it is right in line with what he warned against in the Sermon on the Mount, that "Not all who say to him Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven". Here is a test for your heart: can you forgive, do you understand the weight of forgiveness God gave to you? Weel, these are the signs of a child of God! If you have answered no to the above, cry out to God for his forgiveness, and find a perfect savior!

DISCUSS: If we can not lose our salvation (and to be clear, we CANNOT) why do we find passages like this in Scripture? What purpose do they serve?