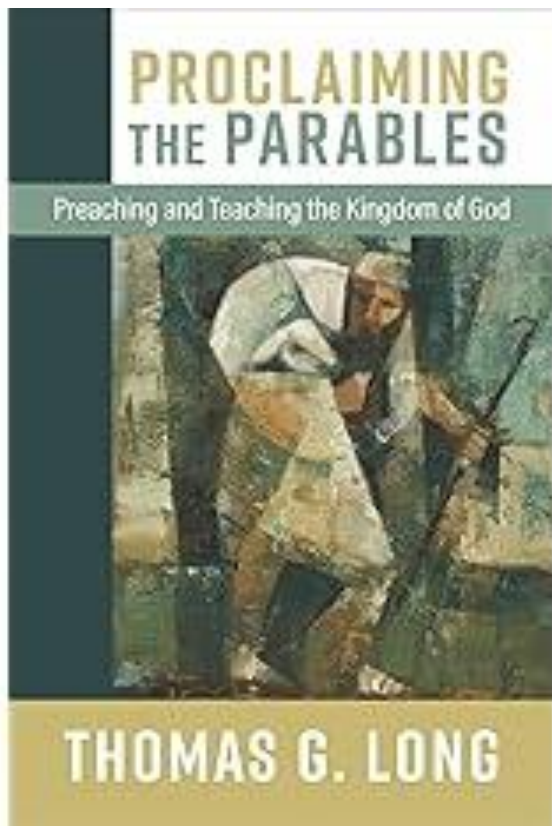
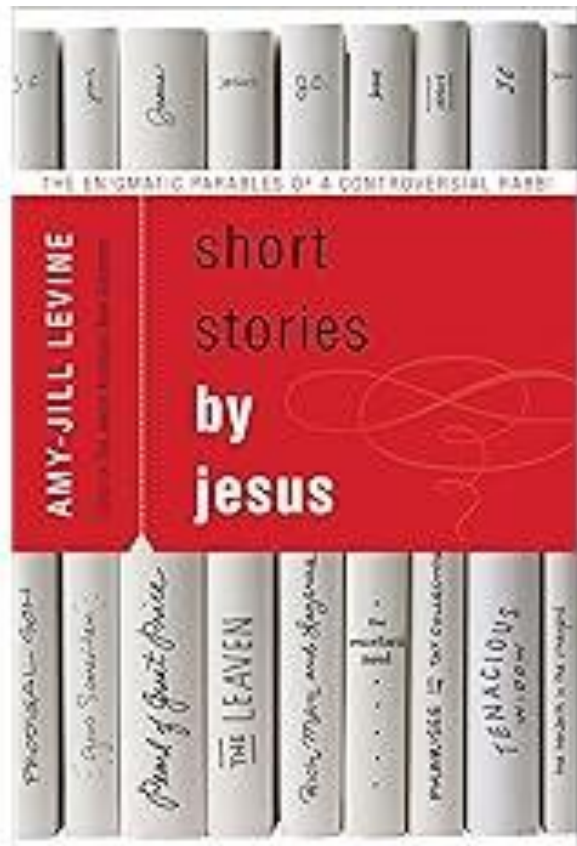


St. John Missionary Baptist Church
Short Stories by Jesus: What Do We Know About Jesus' Parables

Session 1

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What is a parable?

- What do we know about parables?
- “A parable is a ...story, example or image from our world of experience or imagination and is compared to God’s kingdom.” (Long)
- “Parables...[are] literary devices with transformational, even destabilizing, powers.” (Long)
- “Jesus parables stimulated shocking transformations in hearers. The hearer not only learns **about the kingdom of God**, he participates in it.” (Long)
- “The function of the parables then, is to fill in the concept, to flesh out the definition, to indicate what this hooped for reality is going to be like.”
(Long)
- **More than “getting the point” of the story—it should be about how we can participate and be transformed, challenged by Jesus’ story.**
- Too many us have “domesticated” the stories; made them like childlike stories. “An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”

Jesus' Parables

- “Parables, stories ...are often seen as the hallmark of Jesus’ teaching....The crowds then needed to find their own understandings, and we too need to find ours.” (Amy-Jill Levine)
- How we domesticate Jesus’s provocative stories
- Pep talk vs.provocation; comfort vs challenge; monologue vs motivation
- Key question for us: What is the challenge of the parable?
- We should “listen anew”; questions/challenges “not only relevant, but perhaps more pressing than ever.: (Levine)
- So for the this session and next —want us to try not to rest in what we’ve learned before but look at Jesus’ story in a fresh way—to find out how we should be challenged. How can we be shocked and transformed?
- How do these stories help us to live out the kingdom of God here and now?

Short Stories by Jesus

- Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son
- What are the themes? What are the themes we have embraced?
- “In its original context the parable of the Prodigal Son would not have been heard as a story of repentance or forgiveness....Instead, the parables messages of finding the lost, of reclaiming children, of reassessing the meaning of family offer not only good news, but better news.”
- Titles Matter: How do we think about these stories:
- The Prodigal Son/The Lost Son/The Prodigal and His Brother

Short Stories by Jesus

- The Lost Sheep
- Luke 15:1-2 —introduction
- See NRSV
- See Matthew 18 —same parable
- Differences? Context?
- See the first two verses a about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners? Does this help us understand the challenge?
- What is the challenge for us?
- The flock is complete?
- Counting; the importance of counting
- “When was the last time we took stock, or counted up who was present rather than simply counted on their presence? Will we take responsibility for losing, and what effort will we make to find it—or him or her—again?” (Levine)

- 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 Sheep (Matthew 18)
- 10 “Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. 12 What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Lost Coin

- 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.”

Short Stories by Jesus

- The Lost Coin
- Ten days wages —a woman of means
- Themes of loss, search, completion, joy
- Shift in this parable —the woman/owner takes responsibility of the loss
- Have you ever lost something in your house —like a coin? What have you done to find it? Why?
- We can celebrate but can we take our responsibility in the losing?
- What is the challenge for us?
- Sheep, Coin, and Prodigal: Clues in Interpretation
- Connection: loss, joy, feasting

Short Stories by Jesus

- The Lost Son
- The “crown jewel” of Jesus’ parables
- Significance of the two sons
- Who are the persons in the story? Father, younger son, older son
- Father complicit?
- Younger son believable in his contrition, to return home?
Conniving?
- And what about the older son?
- The language of resurrection
- The father is now in the role of the man/sheep, woman/coin—in dealing with the older son/lost son

- The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother
- 11 Then Jesus[a] 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[b] 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.’[c] 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[d] 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.’ ”

Short Stories by Jesus

- Reconciliations
- No easy interpretation; is that a good thing?
- “What would we do, were we the older son? Do we attend the party?”
- What if we were the father?
- “Recognize that the one you have lost may be right in your own household. Do whatever it takes to find the lost and then celebrate with others, both so that you can share the joy and so that the other will help prevent the recovered from ever being lost again.”
- Hope for our own reconciliations

Short Stories by Jesus

- “We need to take count not only of our blessings, but also of those in our families, and in our communities. And once we count, we need to act. Finding the lost, whether they are sheep, coins, or people, takes work. It also requires our efforts, and from those efforts there is the potential for wholeness and joy.” (Levine)
- Think about the lost, recovery, and joy in all of the stories.
- **Where do we fit in these stories; are we like the shepherd, the woman, the father—and ultimately like Jesus?**