

THE RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF LUKE 15

A teaching outline for group study

Bob Reid, Chair of the Dept. Speech Communication

University of Dubuque

rreid@dbq.edu

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I WHY WAS THERE SUCH ANTAGONISM BETWEEN JESUS AND THE PHARISEES?

- A. Mark 7:1-23 states Jesus' most contentious issue with Pharisaic religion: "You leave the commandment of God and hold fast to the tradition of men" and he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!" (Mk. 7:8).
- B. But Luke 15:1-2 tells us what Jesus did that riled the ire of the Pharisees.
 - 1. For the Pharisees, a "sinner" was either an immoral person who did not keep the law or
 - 2. One of the "people of the land" (*'am hā'āres*) incapable of reading Torah (e.g. according to *Hagigah 2.7* a Pharisee would be defiled [rendered unclean] by sitting on the clothes of one of the 'common people')

II THE TEXT OF LUKE 15:1-32

(With minor refinements, the following analysis affirms Ken Bailey's exegesis of Luke 15; *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* [Eerdmans: Combined edition 1986]: 142-206.)

Lk. 15:1-32— A SERIES OF PARABLES IN RESPONSE TO PHARISAIC "GRUMBLING"

	<i>Scene I: The Hostility of Pharisees to Jesus' Acceptance of Sinners</i>	(1-2)
{15:1}	A Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.	SINNERS
{2}	B And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,	GRUMBLING SAYING
	A' "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."	SINNERS
	<i>Scene II: Parable of the Hundred to One Odds of Redemption</i>	(3-7)
{3}	So he told them this parable:	
{4}	A 1 "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?"	100/1 ODDS 99 THE LOST ONE
{5}	B When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.	HE REJOICES
{6}	B' And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'	GATHERS A PARTY REJOICE WITH ME
{7}	A' 1 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents	REJOICING OVER 1/100
	2 than over ninety-nine righteous persons	99
	3 who need no repentance.	THOSE NOT LOST

Scene III: Parable of the Ten to One Odds of Redemption?

(8-10)

- {8} A 1 “Or what woman
having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them,
2 does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully
until she finds it? 10/1 ODDS
LOST ONE FOUND
- {9} B When she has found it,
B’ she calls together her friends and neighbors,
saying, ‘Rejoice with me,
for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ GATHERS A PARTY
REJOICE WITH ME
- {10} A’ 1 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God
2 over one sinner who repents.” REJOICING
LOST ONE FOUND

Scene IV Parable of the Two to One Odds of Redemption (In Two Acts)

Act I: The Odds Against a Lost One being Found

(11-32)

- {11} Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons.
2 SONS- IN 2 ACTS
- {12} A The younger of them said to his father,
‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’
So he divided his property between them. A SON IS LOST
- {13} B A few days later the younger son gathered all he had
and traveled to a distant country,
and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. GOODS SQUANDERED
- {14} C When he had spent everything,
a severe famine took place throughout that country,
and he began to be in need. ALL IS LOST
- {15} D So he went and hired himself out
to one of the citizens of that country,
who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. THE DEPTHS OF SIN
- {16} E He would gladly have filled himself
with the pods that the pigs were eating;
and no one gave him anything. TOTAL REJECTION
- {17} F But when he came to himself he said,
‘How many of my father’s hired hands
have bread enough and to spare,
but here I am dying of hunger! COMES TO HIMSELF
- {18} F’ I will get up and go to my father,
and I will say to him,
“Father, I have sinned INITIAL REPENTANCE
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} E’ 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. TOTAL ACCEPTANCE
- {21} D’ 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.’ FULL REPENTANCE
- {22} C’ 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.	EVERYTHING GAINED
{23}	B’ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;	GOODS TO CELEBRATE
{24}	A’ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.	REJOICING OVER ONE WHO REPENTS
 <i>Act II: The Odds Against a Willingness to Save the Lost:</i>		
{25}	A “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.	BROTHER HEARS JOYFUL CELEBRATION
{26}	He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.	
{27}	B He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’	YOUR BROTHER IS SAFE AND SOUND
{28}	C Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.	FATHER EXPLAINS
{29}	D 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.	COMPLAINT: HOW YOU TREAT ME UNFAIRLY
{30}	D’ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’	COMPLAINT: HOW YOU TREAT HIM UNFAIRLY
{31}	C’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.	FATHER EXPLAINS
{32}	B’ 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.’”	YOUR DEAD BROTHER IS ALIVE
	A’

II ON TABLE FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS

A. Two further comments on Jesus’ eating with sinners.

1. To understand what Jesus was doing in eating with *sinners* it is important to realize that in the East, even today, to invite a person to a meal is an honor. It is an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness; in short, sharing a table meant sharing life. Eschatological banquets in which all are invited are common themes in Jesus’ parables. But to eat with these people in everyday life was something quite different. Being a humanitarian can be applauded by all. Hosting the unwashed hordes at your table is another matter. Actually eating with such people is one of the most meaningful expressions of the message of redeeming love that Jesus enacted.
2. Why Taxpayers. A Jew entering the custom services cut himself off from decent society. he was disqualified from being a judge or even a witness in court and excommunicated from the synagogue. Members of his family were considered equally tarnished. Because of their exactions and extortions custom officials were considered as legally no better than murderers and robbers. Money handled by them was considered tainted and could not be used for charity, for to touch wealth gained through indecent work is to share in its guilt (*DNTT 3, 756*).

III GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are the implications of the mathematics of the three parables? (100:1, 10:1, 2:1)
2. What are the implications of the unfinished parallelism of vs. 32?
3. How does all this relate to why Jesus told the 3 parables?

IV. A CLUSTER OF THEOLOGICAL THEMES REVEALED IN THE PARABLES

- A. *Joy*— it is always expressed as something to be shared in community: the shepherd calls together his friends and neighbors as does the woman and the father; joy is expressed in heaven and before the angels.
- B. *Restoration costs*— the shepherd carries the burden of the sheep on his shoulders, the woman stops everything and housecleans, the father sacrifices the fatted calf.
- C. *Repentance*— looking at repentance across the parables. Did the lost sheep repent? Did the lost coin repent? *Did the lost son actually repent?* One scholar notes that “being found” is equated with “repentance” (vv 7, 10, 32) in these parables in radically new ways. The point is that God’s effort to diligently seek the lost is more important than the quality of the repentance that allows an individual to be declared “found.”
 1. The rabbi’s in Jesus day considered repentance to be a work that an individual did to earn God’s favor; hence repentance had to be sincere and accompanied by reparations for the sin along with a determination to avoid all future proclivity to sin. In other words (and especially after the loss of the Temple), repentance atoned for sin.
 2. These parables offer a radically different view. They speak of—
- D. *God’s Gracious Love*— the first two parables are especially explicit in describing the efforts people will exert to recover lost property and their deep satisfaction when they succeed. The inference is that tax collectors and sinners really belong to God, despite all the appearances to the contrary, and that God wants them back and will take the trouble to find them. “The characteristic feature of these 2 parables is not so much the joy over the repentant sinner as the Divine love that goes out to seek and save “ (Manson). *Joy* is the response that occurs because of the success of the mission.

V. THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS AND A THEOLOGY OF GRACE

- A. Consider the Prodigal Son’s Behavior: Is it or is it not repentance?
- B. Consider the father’s behavior: His actions can be seen as a set of calculated behaviors intended to offset the appropriate response by the villagers for a son who “wished his father dead.”— the gauntlet.
 1. Flowing robes as self humiliation before the villagers
 2. The father runs the gauntlet for his son
 3. the public kiss as a sacrament of reconciliation
 4. the son now grasp that the issue is not the lost money but the broken relationship— he was incapable of healing the broken relationship, only the father could do that. **Any new relationship is pure gift from his father.**
 5. And the best robe, the ring, sandals, and the celebratory calf.
 6. Repentance is now presented as *acceptance of grace and confession of unworthiness.*
- C. Consider the older brother’s behavior: In his anger the older son publicly insults his father and demonstrates himself to be as ‘lost’ as the brother who went to the far country. The father extends the same “love in humiliation” to this son, but **no** confession and repentance result. Rather the older son launches a bitter tirade against the father and story ends abruptly without any resolution of this problem. Ken Bailey suggests that, in light of the two preceding parables where rejoicing concludes the stories as a response to that which is found, the form of Jesus parabolic story of the older brother demands a final response in A’ that **should** have been something like this:

And the elder son came and entered the house and joined in the music and dancing

And he began to celebrate. And the two sons were reconciled to their father. (p.191)

- D. But the father's final appeal for reconciliation with the elder son is left unresolved— for it is precisely the attitude of the Pharisees that Jesus is trying to force them to see with the 3 parables. They said “Yes!” to the conclusion to the first 2 parables; but would fight to the death that such a response was unacceptable at the conclusion of the 3rd parable. And that's the point. We miss it because of the problem of our romanticism of the first half of the parable of the younger son. .
- E. The Point. Even though it is so easy to forget: Sin is not our immorality nor our social unworthiness. *Sin is our broken relationship desperately in need of restoration.* Grace is the opportunity to accept the relationship as gift of God, to live our lives each day as gift of God, lived in reliance on God. One son accepts that restoration. The other son, feeling justified in his piety, refuses and becomes alienated from the father because of it.