

# Parables E4 Final

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## **The Crisis of Decision**

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Tim: Hey, everybody. This is Tim at the BibleProject, and this is a quick additional note before we jump into the podcast episode for this week. Like you, I'm being inundated with news, updates, and conversations about this novel Coronavirus pandemic. And it's really important that we all stay informed so that we know what to do. But at the same time, probably like many of you, I have crossed my own mental threshold for the amount of news that I should be consuming. And I kind of go crazy. I can feel my blood pressure and anxiety go up. What I need to do is also remember that I also still have a life and can and should think about other things. And that's probably true for you, too.

And so we just wanted to say this out loud. I don't know if we needed to say it, but we wanted to. We're going to continue with the podcast just to go on with our series on the parables of Jesus. There'll be a different series after that coming in a month and a half or so. Not because we don't think this crisis is important to think about and really think about deeply. But really, it's that Jon and I aren't the people to create that resource. There's so many good resources and podcasts out there.

What we want to offer is a chance to continue to deepen and become more wise and how we read the Bible. And we believe that can give us really important shifts of perspective and new ways to think about this whole crisis and the choices we're making as we go through it. So that's one thing.

One other quick thing, a reminder, Jon said this a couple of weeks ago, for those of you who are a part of a local church community, we'd really want to encourage you to stay connected to your local church online during this time. That way they have the ability to put our resources, to participate in that, and stay connected. Let's all remember to stay financially committed to our local churches during this time. This is going to be devastating for many church communities financially. And so let's remember our commitment to keep giving to our church. Even though we can't be there physically with the people of our church, we can online, and we can financially help keep them supported.

At the BibleProject, we are putting out a weekly resource that's just something additional. If you already have some resources from your church, have things to do, but we wanted to produce one more just called Church at Home. It's a weekly email that takes one of our videos and then we are giving some scriptural readings and some personal and discussion questions to help you kind of reflect. You could take 10 minutes or half an hour to do it by yourself, with your family, or with some other people like in a Google Hangout or something like that.

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If you're not on our email newsletter list, there's a simple way to get it. If you want to get our newsletter or the Church at Home resources that come weekly. You can go to the [bibleproject.com](http://bibleproject.com), our website. Just scroll down to the very bottom and you'll see a simple way to give your email and join our newsletter circle. And there you go, you'll be on the team. So thanks so much for listening. May God's blessing and peace be with you. May God give us courage to trust Him this week and to love our neighbor as ourselves. All right. Let's dove into the episode for this week.

Jon: Hey, this is John at the BibleProject. Right now we're talking about parables on this podcast. It's easy to think about the parables of Jesus as just great moral lessons that we can go away and slowly chew on throughout our lives. But for Jesus and his setting, sometimes the purpose of the parables were meant to create a moment of crisis.

Tim: Jesus comes into Israel, it's the culmination of that covenant story and saying, "You guys, it's now or never where you're going to be the light to the nations and the city on the hill. And I said the only way it's going to happen is if you follow me and the kingdom as I'm presenting it.

Jon: The Jewish people believed that from among them would come a leader, the messiah, who would bring Israel and the whole world into a new age of peace and prosperity. That is the kingdom of God. And Jesus claimed that he was that messiah. The problem was Jesus didn't act like a typical king would act: consolidating power, preparing to take control through might. Instead, he preached about loving and forgiving Father whose ethic seemed upside down.

Tim: And he warns, if you don't accept my way, which is the way of radical forgiveness and reconciliation, you're going to go down the way of the rebels. Either the rebels or the compromising ground. And both of those are going to lead to Jerusalem's destruction. And they did not just a few decades after Jesus was executed and resurrected, what happened to Jerusalem was exactly what Jesus predicted would happen. That's the first context of meaning.

Jon: So today we look at how Jesus used parables to create a crisis. "Are you part of what God is doing or not?" Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Here we are talking about the parables of Jesus, how to read them wisely, how to appreciate what Jesus was doing with these parables. That he wasn't just some moral teacher explaining moral ideas and theological ideas and decided parables are the best way to do that. He's doing something much grander.

Tim: And more focused.

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- Jon: And more focused. That's true. His life had a very crucially important meaning and purpose. Something was happening with him that was culminating the whole story of God's work with Israel. And what he was doing was so important and so confusing to many people...
- Tim: Yes, surprising. Counter-intuitive.
- Jon: ...that he told parables to help people begin to digest and reorient the way they think about what the kingdom of God actually is.
- Tim: For some. For some of the parables did that.
- Jon: For those with ears.
- Tim: Yes, for people with ears. But then they also were told to throw other people off his trail. At least that's what he said he was doing.
- Jon: And the surprising nature of God's kingdom is a main theme that goes through a large chunk of his parable. That the yeast in the dough...
- Tim: The tiny seed that grows into a huge tree.
- Jon: The way you think about the kingdom of God needs to change.
- Tim: It's probably wrong. The assumption is probably wrong.
- Jon: Let me give you new word pictures, images, and metaphors to reshape that if you have ears to hear. There's two other themes you want to walk through. And so let's get into those.
- Tim: The first was about the kingdom of God the way Jesus is bringing it, it's the real fulfillment of the whole story of the Hebrew scriptures and of God of Israel. But the way that it's coming is going to surprise you. That's the first main theme in the parables. Another big main theme in the parables similar, but it is different, it's that the value system that God's kingdom endorses and is creating among Jesus' followers, it is upside down and opposite of how his listeners see the world and what his listeners value.
- Jon: These kind of seem to go hand-in-hand.
- Tim: They do. The way that it's arriving is surprising. Here is the social order that it creates is equally surprisingly. Yeah, you're right. They are related. Into this category, go most of the parables that typically get assigned teaching moral truths. So his parables about forgiveness, about money, about the radical inclusive invitation to God's kingdom, this is kind of where all of those live. We already read one of them: the parable of the meal with the Pharisees is a stellar example.

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Jon: You think this is the party where you're all important, the real parties down the street where all the people you think are not important are there.

Tim: That's right. So the point isn't like the previous category, how and when it arrives - the kingdom of God arrives. It's when the kingdom of God arrives it will assert God's rule over the world and people who want to live in that kingdom will take on the way of life that the kingdom of God endorses. And what is that way of life? Well, surely that guy says at the table, that it's like a bunch of Jewish men sitting in social rank...

Jon: ...eating a meal. When you put it that way, no.

Tim: No. Jesus says, "No, it's not like that at all." Think of the parables about forgiveness. One he tells at another meal at a Pharisee's house and a woman, a sex worker, that they gave up that way of life and income, joined his band of followers, comes and pours her perfume on his feet. In a room full of religious experts and authorities, this woman walks in. This is such a moment of public shame in their eyes on Jesus. That both that he associates with her according to their social ladder, but also that she does burst into the room and did this thing. That's right.

And then so Jesus tells a story. "You know, there were two guys who one - making up the numbers here, whatever - fifty, one or ten thousand. And the lender forgave both their debts. Which one's going to be more grateful?" And then the guy says, "The one who was forgiven more." And then he made the point. So the real value set of God's kingdom is not your own self-made social status. The kingdom of God does not endorse our currently existing social ranks. It actually undermines them with the radical gift and grace nature of the kingdom. So it creates a flat social playing field. That's a big theme in Jesus' teachings.

But notice, his teachings about forgiveness ultimately are getting to this social rank issue even. When you don't forgive someone because they've wronged you, like with my brother sins against me, so and so, but then when I cut someone off, when I don't forgive them and cut them off, especially in that kind of society, that's a huge social consequence. They're outside the pale of God's forgiveness and grace. Or at least mine. If I cut someone out of my family or life, I'm making a judgment about their worth, their ultimate worth. Actually, if you think about this, there might be somebody who say God can forgive them. That doesn't mean I have to. But Jesus...

Jon: Or that you can forgive but still have boundaries.

Tim: That's right. Forgiveness, this is in Matthew Chapter 18, forgiveness is different than reconciliation in Jesus' mind. You can forgive someone and

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not be best friends with them again and not even have to really be around them at least by yourself.

Jon: Where does he talk about this?

Tim: When he says someone wrongs you and then he says, "Go to them yourself. But if that's not a safe situation, don't ever be alone with them again. Go with a couple of others, then bring more people in." So for an unreconciled relationship, Jesus doesn't envision just as you hang out with them.

Jon: Magic reconciliation.

Tim: In fact, he tells you not to hang out with them alone. It's not a safe situation. But you can still forgive a person.

Jon: So there's a difference between I'm holding out forgiveness and I see you as lesser.

Tim: That's right. In Jesus mind, when God forgives somebody, his aim is a full reintegration, reconciliation, and inclusion within the covenant family. This is why in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our sins just as we forgive," so forgiveness is actually one of the ways that God's people imitate the arrival of the kingdom of God. It's an expression of the value set. This is a good example. Jesus is a moral teacher. He taught about forgiveness.

Jon: Yeah, I see. As some abstracted thing above them verses, no, this is...in order for this new type of community to exist forgiveness has to be at the core of it.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: And in an honor-shame society, it seems like the volumes turned up a little bit or like it's important for me to recognize that you are important. You're important and you can be part of this with me. And so I'll forgive you. Verses you can forgive even if you don't...I don't know. I'm not...

Tim: You can forgive them. It doesn't mean that things go back to...it doesn't necessarily mean, although that's what you should aim for.

Jon: I'm just trying to understand how you would use a lack of forgiveness to keep social status.

Tim: Maybe status. Maybe the vertical higher lower status doesn't help. I think translate it onto a horizontal plane and just boundary line.

Jon: Who's in and who's out.

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- Tim: Who's in and who's out. You wronged me, you're out. And just this whole point is, if God was to use that strategy with His covenant people, Israel, we're all out. And the radical gift of God's kingdom that is so surprising is we don't even realize how outside of the boundaries of the covenant we all are. And God is still inviting us inside to the party, at least while there's time.
- Jon: And God has conditions for joining the party.
- Tim: Totally. He can forgive and so I come to the party and in the same way, we can forgive people and say, "Let's work towards reconciliation." But there's a healthy way to go about that.
- Tim: That's right. That's kind of another category within these parables about the kingdom of God value system is its radical invitation to all any and all regardless of status, rank or your place in relation to the boundary lines. It could be the workers in the vineyard, where the guy hires people all throughout the day.
- Jon: And pays them the same.
- Tim: Pays them all the same. And then the guy's working all day are so ticked off. And he's just like, "What? The farmers..."
- [crosstalk 00:14:25]
- Tim: No, what he says is, "Are you angry because I'm generous? You're angry at me for being generous?"
- Jon: Yeah because you weren't generous to me. You're generous to this guy. If you're going to be generous, be fairly generous.
- Tim: Which defeats the whole purpose. Be generous according to people's worth. Or famously just the three lost and found parables. These are some of the most famous parables. This in Luke 15.
- Jon: The lost coin and the lost...
- Tim: Sheep.
- Jon: That's the last one, right?
- Tim: It starts with the sheep, then the coin, then the son. The lost son. The prodigal son. Here, look at Luke 15.
- [00:15:33]

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- Jon: Luke 15. "And Jesus said, 'A man had two sons, the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country. And there he squandered his estate with loose living.'"
- Tim: That is the New American Standard.
- Jon: What's it in Greek?
- Tim: Wasteful.
- Jon: Wasteful?
- Tim: Yeah. In one older English translation was prodigally.
- Jon: Oh! And that's where that term comes from?
- Tim: In a prodigal way. Which means indiscriminant or to spread it just out. Spread out.
- Jon: Interesting.
- Tim: The adverb means "in a hopeless or lost state."
- Jon: Okay. I wouldn't have known there was a hopeless state to it.
- Tim: Here we go. Here's the Standard New Testament Greek Dictionary. "It's used in the writings of Justin in the second century A.D of a madness that knows no bounds. Wasteful.
- Jon: Prodigal.
- Tim: Prodigal.
- Jon: Wasteful. So he just went out and he...
- Tim: He blows it. Waste it all.
- Jon: He went on a bender. "Now when he'd spent everything wastefully, a severe famine occurred in that country and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country and he sent him into his field to feed pigs."
- Tim: Pigs. Jesus is Jewish. The audience is Jewish.
- Jon: Yeah. You don't eat pigs. You don't raise pigs.
- Tim: No. They are ritually impure. This is bad situation.



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Jon: He's not in Israel anymore. He's in some distant country. "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating. And no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my fathers hired men have more than enough bread and I'm dying here with hunger. I will get up and go to my father and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven. And in your sight I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me one of your hired men.'"

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and has been found. And they began to celebrate.'"

Tim: Let's pretend that the parable stops there.

Jon: Most people do.

Tim: That's right. Or at least most people's imagination. So if you stop the parable right there, it has the same plot structure as the sheep and the coin. Except there is one important difference in terms of the character's development here. One it's a sheep, the other one it's a coin. And the sheep in the coin aren't blamed. They're not active characters in those little parables.

Jon: The active characters are the shepherd or the woman.

Tim: That's right. It's the most developed character. So here the father becomes a real developed character and so does the thing that is lost. So if you use that grid, then you get two, and if says this is a one, two, three is the punch line, you kind of expect this. So the son's portrait is really developed. He asks a shameful claim. "The thing that you would give to me when you die, give it to me now." That's not awesome.

Jon: In today's day and age, it's pretty normal. Like, "Can I have some of my inheritance now?"

Tim: Oh, I see. Yeah, got it. For the whole thing as opposed to part of it ahead of time. And it's not because he's in dire straits now. He just wants it.

Jon: He just wants to go party in another nation.

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- Tim: Totally. Notice that Jesus spent a lot of time developing the nature of this self-imposed exile. In fact, let's run with that observation. It's about an Israelite son who squanders the generous thing that the father wants to give him in good time but he wants it now.
- Jon: He sees it and he takes it.
- Tim: Sees, he takes it. And then he exiles himself to the land of the gentiles and then finds himself as a slave among the gentiles. And there he comes to his senses. And it's like, "I've made a very bad decision."
- Jon: Did he call it something? I've made a horrible mistake.
- Tim: That's it.
- Jon: What's that from?
- Tim: I don't know. I've made a horrible mistake.
- Jon: That sounds so familiar.
- Tim: It's a meme. Oh, it's from Arrested Development. It's something the job character.
- Jon: Oh, I've made a huge mistake.
- Tim: I've made a mistake.
- Jon: That's right. It's that moment of just honest self-reflection. "I've made a huge mistake."
- Tim: First, let's just stop there. This is for sure Jesus is activating the story of Israel - shaming their father, which is the normal metaphor in the Prophets for Israel as the son of the father who raised them. This Hosea 11...All throughout the book of Hosea. And then taking the things that God gives them and wasting them. This is Hosea 2, and then now being lost and slaves in a distant land to the Gentiles. This just has the whole story.
- Jon: This is the story of Israel.
- Tim: This is the story of Israel.
- Jon: Wait, the younger son is story of Israel.
- Tim: Or at least it's meant to echo that. And then the whole point is that this son now thinks that he's unworthy and outside the bounds. And surprisingly, what he discovers is that his father will...how do you say?

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It's the idea that he tucks in his garments and running and embracing him.

Jon: Enthusiastically bring him back

Tim: It's extreme. The point is, Jesus is turning up the volume on the extreme emotion that the father experiences, and that also contrasts what the son thought would happen. The point is this father's way more forgiving and merciful than the son ever imagined.

And notice the line. What the father says. Repeats what the shepherd and the woman said in the previous parables. The shepherd said, "I found my sheep that was lost." The woman said, "I found the coin that was lost." The father says - he adds a new metaphor - "The son of mine that was dead has come back to life. He was lost and has been found." Now, all of a sudden, being lost is being equated with death. Being found is equated with resurrection and new life. This is Ezekiel 37.

Jon: Which is?

Tim: The Valley of dry bones. Exile is like death. People in exile say our bones have dried up sitting here in Babylon. And God says he's able to bring life to the dead. This has echoes of the Hebrew prophets all over it. This is kind of a meta commentary on the story of Israel. But remember, who's he saying this to and about?

Jon: It's people who are judging that he is offering inclusion to people who seem like they're way too outside the boundary lines.

Tim: So he tells a story that imitates the story of Israel breaking covenant and going to exile, but being invited by radical generosity back into the real Promised Land and the party and resurrection and the renewal of the covenant people. This actually very similar then to the party thing. How blessed is the Shabbat meal in the Kingdom of God? And Jesus tells the parable "this isn't actually that party. The real party is the thing that I'm doing with the poor and the crippled and the lame." It's very similar here.

Jon: In what way?

Tim: The tax collectors and sinners are coming to Jesus and they're having these meals and these parties and the religious leaders grumble. Because clearly when the kingdom of God comes...

Jon: There's not going to be a party like this.

Tim: No. And it will include those people. Again, Malaki 4, "The Day of Lord is coming like fire. Who can stand?"

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Jon: Yes, it will be clear.

Tim: A separation between the righteous and wicked. And in that moment, then the Pharisees think they are the ones in the oppression of exile and we're waiting for God's kingdom to liberate us. And Jesus is retelling the story of Israel but he swapped out the players so that the real people who are sitting in exile are the people that you, Pharisees have written off - the Israelites you've written off from the Covenant life of Israel right now in the present. You've exiled them and so I'm including them through radical generosity in these parties. The celebration parties. I guess, just again, it's the multiple layers of the story here.

Jon: You are representing us as a nation.

Tim: You're representing God.

Jon: You represent God and what He's doing through us for the world. And don't you realize that central to the story is that we've been blowing it and we even had to go out into exile and God just radically, generously is bringing us back. If you have that in mind, why would you look at these people and think...

[crosstalk 00:25:09].

Tim: That's right. That they're worse than you are.

Jon: It's like you are that man. That moment with Nathan and David.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: I never saw that in this parable. Wow.

Tim: And that's why I had to stop there because that's what the whole actual last movement of the parable is about. The actual parable goes on to tell the story of the older brother who sees this...I'll continue now. This is all kind of pop. Vs. 25. "Now, the older son was out in the field. He came and approached and heard the party, the music, the dancing. He doesn't even go in. He tells one of the servants to come out to him and he says, 'What's all this?' The servant said, 'Well, your brothers come back and your father killed the fatten calf because he received him back safe and healthy.' But he got angry. He would not go in."

So his father came out to him - notice now the father's gone out to both of his sons - and he began pleading with him. Again. more generous than you would expect. "But he answered his father, 'For all these years I've been serving you, I've obeyed your commands - the analogies come into

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the surface little bit here in the parable for Jesus' audience - you never gave me a young goat so that I could have a party as my friends.

And this son of yours who's eaten your wealth with prostitutes comes and you kill the fattened calf for him. And the father said, 'Son, you've always been with me. Everything that is mine is yours but we had to celebrate for the brothers of yours that was dead has come back to life. He was lost, and now he's been found.'

Jon: So the thing that's new to me in this telling, I understood that the religious leaders are supposed to identify with the older brother. But first, they're supposed to identify with the younger brother too.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Ultimately, that's the story of us all - all of us. Israel. And maybe you and your own personal journey have never done an exile but that's our collective story. You're part of that. And so first, empathize and identify with that, but now realize in your personal story, you've never actually gone out and done that. Like you're the older brother.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. The goal is for the Pharisees and the tax collectors and prostitutes to all see themselves as even younger brother, equally culpable and guilty, equally mercifully forgiven by the father. In this moment, the Pharisees have placed themselves on a higher status.

Jon: "I never left."

Tim: But here within the covenant. It's not like the Greco-Roman social ladder. It's within the covenant.

Jon: And it's so interesting that they never left but they're not at the party.

Tim: That's right. "I've been with you."

Jon: "I'm here. I didn't leave. But you're not at the party. Come to the party. We're having a party." He's like, "No. I don't want that party. That party doesn't jive with me."

Tim: That's right. And now we're back to the surprising nature of the kingdom. The real party is happening in a way and in a place that the people who thought...

Jon: Just because you're here doesn't mean you're actually here.

Tim: That's right. Totally.

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- Tim: So altogether, forgiveness for these tax collectors and sinners to be part of Jesus' new kingdom of God's family, it means forgiveness of sins. Huge theme in his ministry. So we've received God's forgiveness of sins to become a part of the new covenant people. And we should imitate that towards each other through radical forgiveness. And what radical forgiveness, because of God's generous grace to renew the covenant, that creates a very diverse group of people.
- Jon: Which then brings us back to the surprising nature too in the stories of kind of like the wheat and the tare. Is that the right story were the...?
- Tim: Oh, it's made up of the righteous and the wicked and you can't tell them apart right now.
- Jon: You can't tell them apart. Don't try to come to this party and tell me who's supposed to be here or not.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right. Because some weeds look like wheat and some wheat are actually weed.
- Jon: I think that's the concern is that a sex worker comes in and you're kind of like, "Can we really trust this person actually is going to change and fit in. It's kind of like they really got to prove it. And Jesus is like, "Look, don't worry about that. It's not your responsibility.
- Tim: That's right.
- Jon: It's so interesting to think about a community of people that are following Jesus together but you walk into it and it's kind of uncomfortably like, "Wait, does everyone here actually really...?"
- Tim: Committed?
- Jon: Yeah.
- Tim: Totally. This has been a perennial issue throughout the history of the Jesus movement. So we're ranging broader now. Once you get into the letters of Paul or the apostles, you're at a different moment.
- Jon: That's true.
- Tim: The story where now you're out there in the Greco-Roman world and you're a persecuted religious minority, and so knowing who's really committed, it matters. Paul says to that guy sleeping with his mother in law in Corinth, He's like, "You're doing something that shameful even in the eyes of our Greek and Roman neighbors. You're going to bring the governor down. He'll shut down cause he'll think we're just this weird sex

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cult. They're going to shut us down. Expel that guy." So he expels that guy. Or at least they ask that he's expelled.

And then you find out in 2 Corinthians that that freak the guy out and that he softened his heart and turned around. But tribal boundary maintenance sometimes in some moments really is important to exclude certain kinds of behavior. But there's a balance between this radical inclusive.

Jon: I don't know if I'm trying to imagine that Jesus is saying let's just excuse behavior.

Tim: That's right. Because the tax collectors who are there very clearly also heard him give the Sermon on the Mount.

Jon: But there's an uncomfortable amount of "wait, is this person really changed or not?"

Tim: It seems like Jesus wants to take the authority to evaluate people's hearts and motives and where they're at with God. He wants to take that away from us and give that to the all-knowing Father who's generous and merciful and wants us to imitate that generosity to each other and let God sort it out.

Well, now we're getting into the actually the last part of our conversation, which will be how to wisely interpret the parables and understand how they speak to us today.

Jon: Can I ask one more question about this parable of the prodigal?

Tim: Mm hmm.

Jon: We've had a lot of discussions now about the older and younger brother, the two brothers. Is there anything in this parable is activating in terms of like that whole theme is like brothers, Cain and Abel.

Tim: Oh, sure. Oh, yeah. The fact that it's the younger brother who's being celebrated and the older brother is on the outs.

Jon: The older brother who did seemingly what he was supposed to do doesn't get the favor.

Tim: Correct. For sure the whole book of Genesis is echoing here. Absolutely. Thank you. That's a good observation.

Jon: Well, bore the implications of that for this parable. Is it the same as what we've been talking about?

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Tim: Well, it's embodying the same theme of Genesis is that God's electing generous blessing, the people who He chooses to make as the icons of his generosity in the world or the vehicles of his generosity are always the outsider, the no-name, the one of lower rank in order to shame the wise to put it in the language of Paul. That's part of what that theme is doing in Genesis. And I think Jesus is picking up on that here. It's a part of the upside-down. In other words, the surprising upside-down nature of God's kingdom is actually very consistent with God's behavior throughout.

Jon: All through Genesis with Jacob being this swindler kind of guy...

Tim: And then that's the guy he chooses.

Jon: ...who wrestles with God. And he's like, "That's my guy."

Tim: And who exile's himself because of his stupid choices to the land of the Gentiles for 20 years. Totally. Trying to imagine Jesus like sleeping under the stars one night and he didn't have anywhere to stay and he's got the story of Genesis memorized. So he's just reciting them. And he's thinking up a new parable.

Tim: At some point, Jesus thought up this parable with all these little details. He crafted it. And this is a story produced by a mind saturated in the Torah and the Prophets. So good man.

That's the second main theme. What we would normally call Jesus' moral teachings through parables, I think in this perspective shift that we want to invite people into is all highlighting the subversive surprising value system of the kingdom of God that should challenge our existing value systems.

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Tim: The third main theme. The first one is the kingdom's coming in a surprising way. The second theme is the value system turned upside down and turns ours upside down. The third is parables that focus on a moment of crisis brought about by Jesus offering the kingdom here and now, you better make your decision. These are a variety of parables. These are either parables about, hey, somebody is given something and then there's a long period, and then the person who gave it comes back. There's a reckoning. So there's that theme.

Jon: The reckoning?

Tim: The reckoning. The king returning, the master coming back, the landowner, this kind of thing. Or these would be parables of, "Hey, there's



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two ways, two choices you can make right now. You do this, destruction; you do this, life and blessing." In both those cases...

Jon: It's a different type of reckoning.

Tim: Different types of reckoning, but the point is there's a decision to be made that Jesus is offered the kingdom puts in front of Israel in this moment.

Jon: The first one of like the manager coming back, the owner, the reckoning, that seems to be in contrast to the surprising nature, which is the reckoning isn't happening quite yet in the way you would expect. This is kind of saying like, it will come.

Tim: Yes, it will come. And Jesus tells these parables of people going away. A lender gave talents and then went away. These are most consistently and densely gathered around Jesus' approach to Jerusalem. Which tells us once again they're a commentary on what Jesus sees happening in that very moment. For example, after Jesus - Palm Sunday - goes up to Jerusalem, everybody's 'hosanna! Hosanna!' He goes into the temple. Acts like he owns the place, condemns it, quotes Jeremiah 7, the chapter where Jeremiah said this temple's going to be destroyed.

Jon: You've made it the den of robbers.

Tim: Yeah, den of robbers. Connect the dots here, people. Then "By what authority do you do this?" This kind of thing. One of his parables he tells in response we've alluded to in this conversation. It's in Matthew 21:33. . Listen to a parable. So he's telling us...

Jon: This is like his retelling of Isaiah 5.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. In fact, it's verbatim drawn from Isaiah 5 - the opening lines. "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a wall around it, dug a wine press, built a watchtower..."

Jon: So here's he's quoting Isaiah 5 to me.

Tim: That's right. Isaiah 5 upload. "Then" - twist from Isaiah 5 - "he rented a vineyard to some farmers and he moved to another place." He's been away for a while. And there's some other people cultivating this." Now, if I know Isaiah 5, what do I know this vineyard produced? Stinky grapes. So in the place of the stinky grapes, he develops a new little twist, which is about these selfish, irresponsible, violent managers. So when the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenant farmers to collect the fruit. Also was a very common setup in Jesus' day, distant landowners.

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Jon: Because they sold it off to foreigners.

Tim: That's right. So the tenant farmers seized the servants, they beat one, killed another, stone to third. Then he sent other servants more than the first time, and they treated them the same way. The one, two, and here's three. Last of all, he sent is - the Hebrew word is ben.

Jon: He sent his ben,

Tim: Son.

Jon: Ben and bat.

Tim: He sent his ben. That's going to be important. "He sent his ben to them saying, "Surely they will respect my ben. But when the tenants saw the ben, they said to each other, "Here's the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." The logic here is ridiculous.

Jon: Because it's not going to give it to them.

Tim: No. They could kill him. It's kind of absurd logic, I think. And you're supposed to be like, these guys are..

Jon: An unruly bunch.

Tim: So they took him, threw them out of the vineyard, and killed him. So then when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to the tenants and the people around? Like, "He's going to kill him. He's going to get them." He'll bring those wretches, to a wretched end and rent the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time. Jesus said in the temple precincts to the religious experts, "Have you guys read the Bible? The eben that the builders rejected has become the chief eben. And the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

He quotes from Psalm 118, which tells a little parable at this moment in the poem about people who are going to build a new glorious temple building. And it's picturing the builders out in the quarry gathering stones and they're like, "Select some, recruit good ones. It's perfect. Really beautiful. Oh, that one's cracked, has this weird marbling in it." So they reject that stone and they toss it to the side.

And in this little parable in Psalm 118, that eben that the builders rejected, in the Lord's eyes, the way Yahweh looks at that eben, that's the one that I'm going to make the pinnacle of the whole building. And of course, there's a play in Jesus parable, not in Greek yet, but in Hebrew, but it's behind the Greek because the parables Greek in Matthew...

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Jon: And he would have been telling it in Aramaic.

Tim: In Aramaic or Hebrew...

Jon: It works the same way?

Tim: ...it would benor [SP] and obna [SP] in Aramaic. But the point is, is that in this wordplay, Jesus is connecting the son in the parable to the eben. To the stone. The rejected son, the rejected stone. And what he's doing is hyperlinking things that are already hyperlinked in the Hebrew Bible about the rejected son and servant of Isaiah and all this.

So this is Jesus's reply. And then the next line. "Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you..." And he doesn't mean Israel as a whole right here. He's talking to the corrupt Jerusalem leaders. "...that it will be taken away from you and given to people who will produce its fruit. And anyone who falls on this eben will be broken to pieces. And anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." Here he's picking up language from Daniel's dream in Daniel 2 about the big statue of all the kingdoms of Babylon and the world that are crushed by eben.

Tim: And when the chief priest and Pharisees heard the parables, they knew he was talking about them. So he is no longer concealing what he means.

Jon: What he just said. Doesn't take away from you?

Tim: Yes. Yeah, that's right. This is a big major theme crisis parables, sometimes is what scholars call them. What often happens especially with other ones where the guy who gives talents like units of money to these people and he goes away in a long journey. What has tended to happen in church history is we take them out of narrative context and we read them from our moment in the story. Here I am a follower of Jesus. Jesus is like the guy giving me money and opportunities and I better not squander them or else God's going to cast me outside with his weeping and gnashing of teeth or something.

Again, what we're doing is we're taking them out of the context the gospel author is putting them in, which changes the whole meaning of the story it seems to me.

Jon: Tries to change the meaning of that story.

Tim: Well, this is a unique and unrepeatable moment in the story, so to speak.

Jon: Jesus coming to Israel

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- Tim: Jesus come into Israel is the culmination of that covenant story and saying, "You guys, it's now or never. Either you're going to be the light to the nations and the city on the hill. And it's the only way it's going to happen is if you follow me and the kingdom, as I'm presenting it to you.
- Jon: There isn't like another exile.
- Tim: We'll get there. That's in the step of how we first hear the parable in its context, we get the main idea. Then the step is how can we turn that into a principle or a truth that we can apply in an analogous way in the present. But when I say that, I guess I'm saying, "God's been working with Israel. There's a culminating moment here where it's like the trains arriving and this is happening. This is how God's working with Israel. And that's a crisis moment.
- Tim: It forces you to make a decision.
- Jon: Make a decision. You're part of this or not.
- Tim: That's right. So even though it has a totally different structure, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "The one who hears my words and does them is like the one who builds his house on the rock, and the one who hears my words and doesn't do them, build your house on the sand." It's the same point in terms of the mission of Jesus to Israel. It's the same point. My kingdom it's the only way that Israel is going to fulfill its covenant purpose.
- Jon: That kingdom will stand; the rest will sink. If you don't follow my way, which is surprising and subversive...And he get that. That's why he tells the other parables. But if you don't follow the surprising twist of the kingdom story, you're going to destroy yourselves and be destroyed. And that's why these parables are all integrated with predictions of Jerusalem's destruction in the gospel narratives. In other words, Jesus will go back and forth predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and these types of crisis parables. Because that was the moment that he was trying to force that issue with Israel of his day. There you go.
- Jon: This is a cool parable. I mean, this whole son and stone thing is really cool to see him. He's talking about himself then in the parable. Like he really inserts himself...
- Tim: That's right. It's clearly about him
- Jon: ...in a clear way. The son comes the third thing and then they kill the son. He's reflecting on what's going to happen.
- Tim: He's intentionally stirring the pot.

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- Jon: And like you said, these parables are getting more intense as he gets closer to Jerusalem because these parables are commentary of what he sees happening.
- Tim: That's right.
- Jon: And so he sees himself coming in and he knows he's going to get killed.
- Tim: That's all of it. The young women at the wedding who don't fill their lamps of oil and then they reach a moment where it's too late. Same thing. The sheep and the goats. The wedding banquet, the guy who didn't have on the right wedding clothes and he's kicked out.
- Jon: These are the parables that are hardest.
- Tim: And they're usually hard because we don't read them in the narrative context to Jesus' mission. And we try to make them about theological...we try and put them in a different story.
- Jon: All these are about the crisis moment for Israel.
- Tim: In the moment that Jesus is telling. That's right. And when you read them in that context, which is the one that's provided for us, not only do they make so much more sense, they honor what Jesus was actually doing in telling the parables.
- Jon: For example, sheep and goats, just really quick, how does this context reorient that? I mean, that's a classic, very simple one.
- Tim: Totally. That's right. So the whole point of that parable is there's a group of people called the least of these of my brothers who were poor and destitute and in prison. And people who feed them and receive them and take care of them are the ones who receive the kingdom.
- Jon: It's a commentary on his whole ministry.
- Tim: Yes. It's specifically about how as Jesus is passing from the scene he tells that right before the night of Last Supper, which is the moment where he passes the baton, where you all are going to be the ones who now carry on the mission. In Matthew 10, when he sends out the 12 which is the first moment he starts training them to carry on, he says, "Anyone who gives a cup of cold water to these little ones of mine receives you." What the parable of sheep and goats about, it's often made into a parable about here's how God thinks about you and how you treat the poor in general and how you treat the poor in general determines your eternal destiny.

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But do you see what we've done? We've taken the parable out of its context and we swapped it. We swapped the original characters, which is Jesus and the leaders of Israel and his disciples and we've we turned it into a different story. So it's another moment where how Israel will respond to the disciples as they go out and represent Jesus and as they're persecuted and imprisoned and homeless like Jesus, how people receive the gospel through the apostles will determine whether they participate in the kingdom of God or not. So we'll actually talk about this very issue in the next episode.

Jon: Because then you can stop there and go, what is it about helping the poor and accepting the poor? And you can still get this truce of how important that is to God. But to try to create a theological framework of like who's in and who's out kind of thing generalized out. That's where you kind of get more hot water?

Tim: I'm just saying we need to insert an extra step in our study of the parables, which is to take their narrative context in the mission of Jesus in the first century seriously and let that determine what it means.

Jon: And all of these crisis parables seem to have a similar context, which is the crisis is Israel's story is culminating in Jesus. What are you Israel going to do about that?

Tim: And he warns. If you don't accept my way, which is the way of radical forgiveness and reconciliation, you're going to go down the way of the rebels. Either the rebels or the compromisers in the room. And both of those are going to lead to Jerusalem's destruction. And they did not just a few decades after Jesus was executed and resurrected. What happened to Jerusalem was exactly what Jesus predicted would happen because they didn't adopt his way. That's the first context of meaning.

What the parables now mean to us as readers of the gospel, that's very important. But we shouldn't ask that question at the expense of thinking about their first context.

Jon: Thank you for listening to this episode of the BibleProject podcast. If you're enjoying the series on how to read the parables and you have a question about anything we've talked about, it's time to send those in because we're going to get ready for an upcoming question and response episode. So record yourself asking the question, give us your name and where you're from, try to keep it to around 30 seconds or so, that would be great, and you can send those to [info@bibleproject.com](mailto:info@bibleproject.com).

Next week, we're going to discuss the natural way that most of us read parables.

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- Tim: An allegorical approach to the parables essentially is looking at every single detail in the parables and finding a symbolic correspondent. And it leaps the parable out of context and puts it in a new context. Skill to develop in reading the parables is how to identify, one, what are the actual symbols that I'm supposed to think are the important ones, and how do I connect them to what Jesus intended? That's the million-dollar question.
- Jon: Today's episode was produced by Dan Gummel. Our theme music comes from the band Tents. We're crowdfunded nonprofit Portland, Oregon and we make free resources that show the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Thank you for being a part of this with us.
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