

TWO DEBTORS

Interpreting the Parables of Jesus by Craig Blomberg¹

REVIEW: Did you have any additional thoughts about the Lost Sheep or Lost Coin parables or did you experience/apply any of the three main teaching points during the last week?

QUESTION: Would it be helpful to view baptism as a birthday party that celebrates the believer's birth into the kingdom of God?

SIMPLE 3-POINT PARABLES

The Parable of the Two Debtors - (Luke 7:36-50)

I. The three main characters and their correlating identities

<u>The Two Debtors (Lk 7:41-43)</u>	<u>Who they represent</u>
Creditor	→ God
Debtor forgiven more	→ Tax collectors and sinners
Debtor forgiven less	→ Pharisees/teachers of the law

II. Things to consider about the parable - (Discussing the color provided by Jesus)

- Just as with the prodigal and his brother, the two debtors are not complete opposites, because both are forgiven, but the focus lies on the contrasting responses of the two. Like Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb designed to make David indict himself (**2 Sam 12:1-7**), Jesus' question and his host's answer (Lk 7:42-43) make it clear that this short story calls this Pharisee to account for his attitudes and behavior. Arguably, the parable appears at the very center of a chiasmatically structured passage and thus receives climactic focus.
- Simon thus corresponds to the debtor who was forgiven less, and the unwelcome woman who had anointed Jesus matches the debtor who was forgiven more. As with the ninety-nine sheep and nine coins that were not lost, Jesus takes the Pharisees' estimation of themselves at face value for the sake of argument. Indeed, in terms of overall Torah-obedience they most likely were less sinful than many in their society, especially than a woman whose description and behavior suggests that she had probably been a prostitute. Jesus' further remarks (Lk 7:44-47) spell out the correspondences between the characters in the parable and those at the meal and clearly treat the parable as an allegory of God's love for sinners of all kinds. Not surprisingly, then, many critics have viewed this Lukan context for the parable as secondary.
- Moneylenders were common, as farmers of small plots of land in Israel were increasingly unable to pay the high levels of tax that Jewish and Roman obligations combined to create. Eventually, the inability to repay the moneylenders could lead individuals to sell themselves into slavery (to earn a better wage!) or could land them in debtors' prison. The unusual generosity of the creditor in canceling both debts, the larger of which amounted to more than a year and a half's wage for a common day-laborer, points to an allegorical understanding of the imagery from within the parable itself. The common Synoptic usage of the words "debtors," "owe" and "forgive" to refer both to financial and to spiritual obligations (as esp. in the Lord's Prayer—**Mt 6:11-12; Lk 11:4**) reinforces the suggestion that two levels of meaning are present.
 - The Lord's Prayer

¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Second Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2012). **Almost all of this study is taken directly from Blomberg while small portions are italicized to identify a synthesis of his book or a question generated for the purpose of this study.**

- **Matthew 6:11-12** ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- **Luke 11:4** and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”
- As early in his ministry as **Luke 4:18–19**, Jesus’ inaugural proclamation of “release” linked the cancelation of debts with the forgiveness of sins.
 - **Luke 4:18-19 (The theme of jubilee “joy of release”)**
¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

III. Three main characters and three main points

Not only do the three characters of the parable in some sense correspond to the three key individuals at dinner in Simon’s house, but more specific lessons may readily be derived from each.

1. Like the creditor, **God** forgives both categories of sinners and allows them to begin again with a clean slate.
2. Like the debtor owing five hundred denarii, **those who recognize they have much for which to be thankful** will naturally respond in generous expressions of love for Jesus.
3. Like the man owing fifty denarii, **those who take their spiritual condition for granted** and are not aware of having been forgiven of numerous gross wickednesses should not despise those who have been redeemed from a more pathetic state.

These three points are virtually spelled out, in turn, by Luke 7:44–46 (contrasting the behavior of Simon and the woman) and Luke 7:47–50 (the declaration of forgiveness).⁹⁸

IV. Contemporary Application

Right at the point where human piety is affronted (*feeling or showing anger or indignation at some offense or insult*), that is the threshold at which one can begin to get a glimpse at the abundance of divine grace.” Are our churches filled with transformed sinners who have experienced this grace, or with Simon’s contemporary equivalents who remain affronted at the thought of including any such people in our congregations? Do we too often seek to surround ourselves with only those who are already good “insiders” with values identical to ours? The parallels become closer once we recognize that Simon is not portrayed as overtly self-righteous but as someone genuinely forgiven by God.

V. Personal Application

1. *How might you apply any of the three main points to yourself or your own life?*
2. *How might you apply it to the life of a brother or sister who is struggling in their walk with Christ?*
3. *How might you apply it to the life of an unbeliever, bringing God’s perspective to their life (a form of evangelism that explains God or outright evangelism calling them to turn to God)?*

Looking Ahead: Another Simple 3-Point Parable (The Two Sons - Matthew 21:28-32)