

Points of Cultural Misconception of the Parable of the Compassionate Father

1. The *request*: The prodigal's request is an unthinkable breach of traditional culture.
(He wants his father to die.)
2. *His father's gift*: The father reprocesses anger into grace and thereby deeply violates the code of an Oriental patriarch. (As is shown five times in the parable).
3. A *hurried sale*: The prodigal triggers the anger of the community.
(He must leave town quickly.)
4. The *kezaza ceremony*: A threat hanging over the prodigal as he leaves town.
(He must not lose the money.)
5. *Expensive living*: Not **riotous** (KJ), nor **loose** (RSV), nor **dissolute** (NRSV), nor **wild** (NIV).
(The Greek word *asotos* is literally a + sozo, i.e. without saving. *No hints of immorality*)
6. *Search for employment*: The prodigal must find a *paying* job so he can repurchase the land.
(The kezaza ceremony now threatens.)
7. *Inauthentic Repentance*: He projects *A self-serving plan*:
(Augustinian or Pelagian? Complications with the lost sheep and coin.)
8. *Turning point*: The costly demonstration of unexpected love.
(Grace not law. Love is offered before the confession.)
9. A *father* who behaves like a *mother*.
(The father is defined by Hosea 11, not by Middle Eastern culture.)
10. *Authentic Repentance*: The Prodigal Revises His speech – *he is not interrupted*.
(Like the lost sheep, he accepts to be found).
11. *Christology*: Incarnation and atonement meet.
(This happens with the shepherd, the woman and the father.)
12. The *meaning* of the *banquet* (a theological dialogue):
 - a. Father's comments: **Because** - He was lost and is found .. dead and is alive (divine passives)
 - b. Young boy: **Because, he (the Father) received him (the prodigal) with peace.**
 - c. Older son: You killed **for him** the fatted calf.
13. *Older son's anger at grace*. (for some grace is not only amazing – it is also infuriating!)
 - a. His mentality: (You get what you pay for, don't you?)
 - b. His response: (He breaks his relationship with his father - like the prodigal, only more so.)
14. *Father's response*: The Father once again reprocessed anger into grace. At the same time the father urges the older son dealing with the prodigal in the same way.
15. *Older son's final reaction*: An unfinished theological symphony (participation theater).

The Parable of the Two Lost Sons - The Theological Cluster

1. **Sin:** The parable exhibits two types of sin. One is the sin of the law-breaker and the other the sin of the law-keeper. Each centers on a broken relationship. One breaks that relationship while failing to fulfill the expectations of the family and society. The second breaks his relationship while fulfilling those same expectations.
2. **Freedom:** God grants ultimate freedom to humankind, which is the freedom to reject His love. Humankind is free to choose its own way even if that way causes infinite pain to the loving heart of God.
3. **Repentance:** Two types of repentance are dramatically illustrated. The first: earn your acceptance as a servant/craftsman. The second: accept the costly gift of being found as a son.
4. **Grace:** A freely offered love that at great cost reprocess anger into grace for each son.
5. **Joy:** For the father, joy in finding. For the son, joy in being found and restored to community.
6. **Fatherhood:** The image of God as a compassionate father is given its finest definition in all of Scripture. That definition includes the offer of costly love to law-breakers and to law-keepers.
7. **Sonship:** Each son returns to the father either defining (the older son) or intending to define (the prodigal) his relationship to the father as that of a servant before a master. The father *will not* accept. The father offers costly love to each, out of his determination to have sons responding to love rather than servants obeying commands.
8. **Christology:** The father twice takes upon himself the form of a suffering servant who in each case offers a costly demonstration of unexpected love. The woman and the shepherd do some of the same on a lesser scale. There is dramatic "self-emptying" in each case. The third parable embodies an implied one-to-one relationship between the actions of Jesus and the actions of the father in that each welcomes sinners into table fellowship. This unity of action affirms some form of a unity of person.
9. **Family/community:** The father offers costly love to his sons in order to restore them to fellowship in the context of a family/community. The family is Jesus' metaphor for the Church.
10. **Incarnation and Atonement:** The father empties himself and goes down and out to meet the sons where they are (incarnation). In the process he demonstrates costly redeeming love (atonement). Because of who he is, these acts generate incalculable atoning power. Some of the deepest levels of the meaning of both the incarnation and the cross are clearly exposed.
11. **Eucharist:** The son(s?) who partake of this banquet in the parable are sitting and eating with the one who offered costly love to win them into fellowship with himself. The heart of the Eucharist is thus clearly affirmed. The mood of the banquet/Eucharist is that of a celebration, not a funeral. The price paid by the shepherd, the woman and the father is not forgotten at the banquets that conclude each parable. But the atmosphere at the banquet is that of joy at the success of the costly efforts of finding the lost.
12. **Eschatology:** The messianic banquet has begun. All who accept the father's costly love are welcome as his guests. Table fellowship with Jesus is a proleptic celebration of the Messianic banquet of the end times. The parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:15-24 precedes this parable. Luke (or his source) presents the reader with the former parable where "to eat bread in the kingdom of God" finally means to accept table fellowship with Jesus. This same theme is woven into this parable as well.

Two Sons Have I Not [b] (Luke 15:25-32)

Now the *elder son* was *in the fields*,

1.A. and as he came and drew near to the house
he heard *music and dancing*.
And he called one of the *boys*
and asked *what this meant*.

HE STANDS
Aloof

2. B. And he said to him,
“*Your brother* is here (♫ & ♪) (Ⓛ)
and your *father* has *killed the fatted calf* (a feast)
because he received him *with peace*.”
But he was angry and refused to go in.

YOUR BROTHER IS HERE

Anger!!

3. C. So his *father came out*
and was *entreating him*.

COSTLY
Love

4a. D. But he answered his father,
“Lo, these many years *I have served you*
and I *never disobeyed* your commandments,
yet you never gave me a *kid*
to make merry with *my friends*.”

THE PROBLEM
I Want
More Food!

4b. D’ But when *this son of yours* came,
who has devoured your living
with *harlots*,
you killed *for him* the fatted calf.”

YOUR SOLUTION
More Food
For Him!

5. C’. And he said to him, “My dear son, (♠ ♪ & ♣ □ ■ Ⓛ)
you are always with me,
and *all that is mine is yours*.”

COSTLY
Love

6. B’. It was fitting to make merry and be glad,
for this *your brother was dead and is alive*,
he *was lost and is found*.”

YOUR BROTHER - FOUND
(a feast)
Joy

THE FATHER EARNESTLY LONGS FOR THE STORY TO END AS FOLLOWS

7.A. And the older son entered the banquet,
and was reconciled to his brother and his father.
And the father said, “Rejoiced with me
for I have found my two lost sons!”

HE JOINS
The Family

Two Sons Have I Not [a] (Luke 15:11-24)

1. There was a man who had two sons;
and the younger of them said to his father,
"Father! **Give me** the share of **property**
that falls to me."
And he divided his living between them. DEATH

2. **Not many days** later, the younger son **sold all** he had,
journeyed into a far country,
and **wasted** his property in **extravagant living**. ALL IS
And when he had **spent everything**, Lost
a great famine arose in that country,
and **he** began to be in **want**.

3. So he went and joined himself
to one of the **citizens** of that country,
and he **sent him** to his fields to **feed pigs**.
And he would gladly have eaten the pods
that the pigs ate;
and **no one gave him anything**. UNQUALIFIED
Rejection

- 4 a. And when he **came to himself** he said,
"How many of my father's **craftsmen**
have **bread enough and to spare**,
but **I perish** here with **hunger!** **The Problem:**
I Want
More Food!

- 4 b. I will **arise** and **go** to my **father**, and say to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
and am no more worthy to be called your son.
Fashion out of me a **craftsman**.' "**The Solution:**
I Will Work
And Buy Food

5. And he arose and came to his father.
And while he was at a **great distance**,
his **father saw** him and had compassion
and **running he fell on his neck**,
and **kissed** him. UNQUALIFIED
Acceptance

6. And the son said to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
and am **no more worthy to be called your son**.'
And (ⲁⲙⲓ) the father said to the servants
'Bring quickly the **best robe** and put it on him;
and put a **ring** on his hand and **shoes** on his feet, ALL IS
Restored

7. and bring the **fatted calf** and kill it,
and let us eat and make merry;
for this my son was **dead, and is alive**;
he was **lost, and is found**. RESURRECTION
And they began to make merry.