

Parables

Earthly stories with heavenly meanings

Week 5: Forgiveness



Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.
(Luke 15:6)

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One use of parables is to provide an earthly image of a spiritual concept. The parables for this week focus on forgiveness and how the Lord continually forgives us.

What does retrieving what was lost teach us about forgiveness?

AC 9014.3. The Lord forgives everyone his sins, because He is mercy itself. Nevertheless they are not thereby forgiven unless the man performs serious repentance, and desists from evils, and afterward lives a life of faith and charity, and this even to the end of his life. When this is done, the man receives from the Lord spiritual life, which is called new life. When from this new life the man views the evils of his former life, and turns away from them, and regards them with horror, then for the first time are the evils forgiven, for then the man is held in truths and goods by the Lord, and is withheld from evils. From this it is plain what is the forgiveness of sins, and that it cannot be granted within an hour, nor within a year. That this is so the church knows, for it is said to those who come to the Holy Supper that their sins are forgiven if they begin a new life by abstaining from evils and abhorring them.

Day One: The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7

And all the publicans and sinners were near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This Man accepts sinners, and eats with them.

And He said to them this parable, saying,

What man of you, having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the

wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders

rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his

friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I

have found my sheep which was lost. I say to you that

likewise there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner who

repents, more than over ninety-nine just *people* who have no need of repentance.

Laying it on His shoulders

AC 9836:6. That “to put upon the shoulders and carry” is to preserve in a state of good and truth forever with all exertion and power....From this it is that the Lord, who spoke by correspondences, said of the lost sheep when it was found, that “he laid it on his shoulder rejoicing” (Luke 15:5); “the sheep that was lost and was found” is the good with the man who repents.

Joy in heaven over one sinner who repents

AC 5992:3. Especially do the angels call forth the goods and truths that are with a man, and set them in opposition to the evils and falsities which the evil spirits excite. Thus the man is in the midst, and does not perceive either the evil or the good; and being in the midst, he is in freedom to turn himself either to the one or to the other. By such means angels from the Lord lead and protect a man, and this every moment, and every moment of a moment; for if the angels were to intermit their care for a single moment, the

man would be precipitated into evil from which he could never afterward be brought out. These things the angels do from the love they have from the Lord, for they perceive nothing more delightful and happy than to remove evils from a man, and lead him to heaven. That this is a joy to them, see Luke 15:7. Scarcely any man believes that the Lord takes such care of a man, and this continually from the first thread of his life to the last of it, and afterward to eternity.

TCR 528. ACTUAL REPENTANCE IS EXAMINING ONESELF, RECOGNIZING AND ACKNOWLEDGING ONE'S SINS, PRAYING TO THE LORD, AND BEGINNING A NEW LIFE. That man ought by all means to repent, and that his salvation depends on it, is evident from many passages and plain sayings of the Lord in the Word, from among which the following shall at present be mentioned:

John preached the baptism of repentance, and said, Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Luke 3:3, 8; Mark 1:4). Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent (Matt. 4:17). And He said, Because the kingdom of God is at hand, Repent ye (Mark 1:14, 15). Again: Unless you repent, you shall all perish (Luke 13:5). Jesus commanded His disciples, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations (Luke 24:47; Mark 6:12).

Therefore Peter preached repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). And he also said: Repent ye and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19). Paul preached that they should all everywhere repent (Acts 18:30). Paul also declared in Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance (Acts 26:20). Again, he testified both to Jews and to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

The Lord said to the church at Ephesus: I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first charity; repent, but if not, I will move thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:4, 5). To the church at Pergamos: I know thy works, repent (Rev. 2:13, 16). To

the church at Thyatira: I will cast her into great affliction, unless they repent of their works (Rev. 2:19, 22, 23). To the church of the Laodiceans: I know thy works, be zealous, and repent (Rev. 3:15, 19).

There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7).

Questions and Comments

1. When we think of the Lord as a shepherd, putting the lost sheep on His shoulders, we can think of what it says in the Arcana in 9836:6, "That 'to put upon the shoulders and carry' denotes to preserve in a state of good and truth forever with all exertion and power." Does this give us more confidence in the Lord's power to help us repent?
2. When we are working on repentance ourselves, perhaps we can imagine the Lord putting us on His shoulders and carrying us out of a bad habit and into a new way of living.
3. AC 5992:3 is an amazing passage about what angels constantly do for us. How can this knowledge help us?
4. Why does it make angels so happy when we repent?

Day Two: The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

Luke 15:8-10

Or what woman, having ten drachmas, if she lose one drachma, does not kindle a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek with care until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma which I had lost. So I say to you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Ten

AE 675:10. Because “ten” signifies all and much, therefore that number is used by the Lord... in passages where all and much must be understood. As in Luke [above]....

“Ten” here signifies much. This is said of a “woman,” and that “she would light a lamp and sweep the house” because of the spiritual sense in every particular of the Word. In that sense a “woman” signifies the church in respect to the affection of truth, thus also the affection of truth itself which belongs to the church. The “drachma” signifies truth. “To lose the drachma” signifies to lose one of the truths or the knowledges of truth. “To light a lamp” signifies self-examination from affection. “To sweep the house” signifies to traverse the whole mind and to examine every particular where the truth lies hidden. This is the spiritual sense of these words.

Kindling a lamp

AC 9570. The light of the spiritual heaven is the Divine truth that proceeds from the Lord, and the consequent faith, intelligence of truth, and wisdom of good... How the case is with the light of the spiritual heaven shall be briefly stated. In the Lord’s celestial kingdom, which is the inmost or third heaven, there is a light which immeasurably surpasses the light in the spiritual kingdom, which is the middle or second heaven. The light of the celestial kingdom, that is, of the inmost heaven, does not appear as light, but as

flame, the reason being that the good of love reigns in this heaven, and in heaven the good of love is presented to view as flame. But in the Lord's spiritual kingdom, which is the middle or second heaven, there is a light which immeasurably surpasses the light of the world, and yet it appears bright white, for the reason that in this heaven there reigns the truth of faith from the good of charity; and in heaven the truth of faith from this good is presented to view as a bright white light. From this in the Word also, "light" signifies the truth which is from good, and in the supreme sense the Divine truth that proceeds from the Lord's Divine good. From all this it can now be seen what is meant by "the light" of the spiritual heaven, and what by "the flame of the lamp," from which is this light.

Sweeping the house

AC 3142. *For I have swept the house.* That this signifies that all things were prepared, and full of goods, is evident from the signification of "sweeping," as being to prepare and to be filled (about which more below); and from the signification of a "house" as being good. (Concerning "a house" see above, n. 2233, 2234, 2559; and that man himself, from the good which is in him, is called a house, n. 3128.)

The reason "to sweep" signifies to prepare and to be filled, is that nothing else is required of man than to sweep the house, that is, to reject the cupidities of evil and the derivative persuasions of falsity. For then he is filled with goods, because good is continually flowing in from the Lord—but into "the house," that is, into the man who is purified from such things as impede the influx, that is, which reflect, or pervert, or suffocate the inflowing good. Hence it was common with the ancients to speak of sweeping or cleaning the house, and of sweeping and preparing the way. And by sweeping the house was meant to purify oneself from evils, and thereby to prepare oneself for goods to enter; but by sweeping the way was meant to prepare oneself so that truths might be received, for by a "house" was signified good, n. 3128; and by a "way," truth, n. 627, 2333.

Questions and Comments

1. Have you ever experienced a truth that you thought you understood becoming obscure or no longer easy to understand? This parable seems to suggest what we should do when that happens.
2. AE 675:10 says that “to light a lamp” means self-examination from affection. What does AC 9570 suggest we use to examine ourselves?
3. What does it mean to sweep the house?
4. Why isn't it enough to just kindle the lamp?
5. The parable describes the woman as being very happy when she found the lost drachma and wanting to share her happiness with friends and neighbors. Have you ever wanted to share something new you have learned from the Word with the same sort of excitement?

Day Three: The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-25

And He said, A certain man had two sons and the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the part of the substance that is to be put upon me; and he apportioned¹ to them his livelihood.

And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad into a distant country, and there wasted his substance, living recklessly.

But when he had spent all, there arose a strong famine throughout that country, and he began to be lacking. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he longed to fill his belly from the husks which the swine ate; and no one gave to him. And when he came to himself he said, How many hirelings of my father have an excess of bread, but I perish with hunger! Standing up, I will go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hirelings.

And he stood up and came to his father. And being yet a distance away, his father saw him and was moved with compassion², and running, fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

¹ The word here implies varying amounts to each.

² Literally, “moved viscerally,” as in AE 622:10 and elsewhere

But the father said to his servants, Bring out the chief robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

And bring hither the fatted³ calf, and slaughter it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Returning to his father

AC 9391:6. The father said of the prodigal son who had returned repentant in heart, Bring forth the chief robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be glad (Luke 15:22, 23).

One who apprehends only the sense of the letter, will believe that nothing deeper is hidden here, when yet each particular enfolds heavenly things: as that they should put on him the chief robe; that they should put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and should bring the fatted calf, and kill it, so that they might eat and be glad. By the “prodigal son” are meant those who have been prodigal [or wasteful] of heavenly riches, which are the knowledges of good and truth. By his “return to his father,” and his confession that he was “not worthy to be called his son,” is signified repentance of heart and humiliation [or humbling himself]. By the “chief robe” which was to be put upon him are signified general truths... and by the “fatted calf” general goods corresponding to these truths.

TCR 510. I. REPENTANCE IS THE FIRST THING OF THE CHURCH IN MAN.

The communion called the church consists of all men in whom the church is, and the church enters into man when he is becoming regenerate, and everyone becomes regenerate by abstaining from the evils of sin, and shunning them as one would an infernal horde with torches in hand, endeavoring to overtake him and throw him upon a burning pyre.

³ literally, “wheat-fed,” but “fatted” or “fattened” in AC 9391:6, AE 279:6

There are many means by which man, as he progresses in his early years, is prepared for the church and introduced into it. But the means by which the church is established in man are acts of repentance.

Dwelling with swine

HH 488. Those that have been sordidly avaricious [extremely greedy] dwell in cells, and they love swinish filth and such stenches as are exhaled from undigested food in the stomach.

HH 430. The forms under which the lascivious delights of scortatory love are presented to view in hell are excrements and mire; the odors under which they are presented to the sensible perception there are stenches and noisome vapors; and the forms of beasts and birds under which they are there presented to view are swine, serpents, and birds called Ochim and Tziim.

Questions and Comments

1. We have been blessed with lots of truths from the Lord in the New Church. This parable seems particularly applicable when we find ourselves with heavenly riches which are described as “the knowledges of good and truth” (AC 9391:6). Are we using them wisely or recklessly?
2. When we find ourselves in need of forgiveness, does it help to think of the Lord forgiving us like the father of the prodigal son?
3. When we need to forgive someone, does it help to try to follow the example of the father of the prodigal son?
4. Do you see in the parable how the prodigal son went through the process of repentance?

Day Four: The Lost Son, concluded

Luke 15:25-32

But his elder son was in the field; and as he came and was near the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called for one of the boys, and inquired what these things meant. And he said to him, Thy brother has come, and thy father has slaughtered the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.

And he was angry, and was not willing to enter in; therefore his father came out and implored him. And he answering said to the father, Behold, so many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a goat, that I might be merry with my friends; but when this thy son came, who devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast slaughtered for him the fatted calf.

And he said to him, Child, thou art always with me, and all mine are thine. And we ought to be merry and rejoice, because this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Retaliation versus forgiveness

AE 556:8. All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye to them; this is the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31).

Because this is the law in heaven, and from heaven in the church, therefore every evil carries with it a corresponding punishment, which is called the punishment of evil, and it is in the evil as if joined with it. And from this springs the punishment of retaliation which was prescribed for the sons of Israel, because they were external and not internal men. Internal men, as the angels of heaven are, do not wish the retaliation of evil for evil, but from heavenly charity they forgive freely. For they know that the Lord protects all who are in good from the evil, and that He protects them according to the good with them, and that He would not

protect them if, on account of the evil done to them, they should burn with enmity, hatred, and revenge, for these drive away protection.

Mercy

AC 3063. Love is itself turned to mercy and becomes mercy when anyone who is in need of help is regarded from love or charity. Hence mercy is the effect of love toward the needy and miserable.

AC 6180. All mercy is of love; for he who is in love or charity is also in mercy, and the love and charity in him become mercy when the neighbor is in need or misery, and he affords him help in that state. Hence it is that by “mercy” is signified the good of love.

SD 2420. Among all the things I have been allowed to learn from experience and from life with spirits and angels is this, that those who are merciful in the life of the body and exercise even only a little mercy from the heart, receive in the other life an inestimable, thus inexpressible reward: namely, happiness. For all happiness comes through mercy, because it is from mercy. And they receive so much mercy in all things down to the very least, with the fullest sensation, together with happiness, that it is inexpressible.

There is no mercy apart from means

HH 522. But first let us consider what the Divine mercy is. The Divine mercy is pure mercy towards the whole human race, to save it; and it is also unceasing towards every man, and is never withdrawn from anyone; so that everyone is saved who can be saved. And yet no one can be saved except by Divine means, the means which the Lord reveals in the Word. The Divine means are what are called Divine truths, which teach how man must live in order to be saved. By these truths the Lord leads man to heaven, and by them He implants in man the life of heaven. The Lord does this for all. But the life of heaven can be implanted in no one unless he abstains from evil, for evil obstructs. So far, therefore, as man abstains from evil, he is led by the Lord out of pure mercy by His Divine means, and this from infancy to the end of his life in the world and afterwards to eternity. This is what is meant by the Divine mercy. And from this it is evident that the mercy of the Lord is pure mercy, but not apart from means; that is, it does not look to saving all out of mere good pleasure, no matter how they may have lived.

HH 523. The Lord never does anything contrary to order, because He Himself is Order. The Divine truth that goes forth from the Lord is what constitutes order; and Divine truths are the laws of order. It is in accord with these laws that the Lord leads man. Consequently, to save man by mercy apart from means would be contrary to Divine order, and what is contrary to Divine order is contrary to the Divine. Divine order is heaven in man, and man has perverted this in himself by a life contrary to the laws of order, which are Divine truths. Man is brought back into this order by the Lord out of pure mercy by means of the laws of order. And so far as he is brought back into this order, he receives heaven in himself. And he that receives heaven in himself enters heaven.

This again makes evident that the Lord's Divine mercy is pure mercy, and not mercy apart from means.

Questions and Comments

1. AE 556:8 says that enmity, hatred and revenge drive away the protection from evil that the Lord offers. The elder son in this parable seems to be a helpful description of this so that we can watch out for it in ourselves. If we find ourselves hoping for another person to “get what is coming” rather than forgiving freely like angels, then this parable can help us.
2. What does it mean for the Lord's mercy not to be apart from means?
3. What would happen if the Lord's mercy was apart from means?

Day Five: The Two Debtors

Luke 7:36-50

And a certain one of the Pharisees besought Him that He would eat with him; and having entered into the house of the Pharisee, He reclined.

And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, knowing that He sat in the Pharisee's house, obtained an alabaster vessel of ointment; and standing by His feet behind Him, weeping, she began to shower His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

But when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw it, he said within himself, saying, This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is who touches Him, that she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to thee; and he declares, Teacher, say on.

A certain lender had two debtors; the one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

But they having nothing to pay, he graciously forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him most?

And Simon answering said, I assume he to whom he graciously forgave most. And He said to him, Thou hast rightly judged.

And turning to the woman, He declared to Simon, Seest this woman? I came into thy house; thou gavest Me no water on My feet, but she has showered My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Thou gavest Me no kiss, but she, since I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet.

My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she has anointed My feet with ointment.

Thus I say to thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, he loves little.

And He said to her, Thy sins are forgiven.

And they who sat with Him began to say in themselves, Who is this who forgives sins also?

And He said to the woman, Thy faith has saved thee; go into peace.

The numbers 500 and 50

AE 10253:4. That “five hundred” signifies much; and its tenth part, or “fifty,” relatively something, is evident from the Lord’s words to Simon in Luke....

The Lord employed these numbers because they signified much and something. For He spoke from the Divine, thus by means of significatives according to correspondences, and also in all other places, as when He spoke of the virgins, whom He called “ten,” and “five” of them wise, and “five” foolish. He said “ten,” because by this number are signified all, that is, of the church; and “five,” because by this number is signified some part....

When faith saves

Doctrine of Life 51. ...Jesus said of the woman who anointed His feet with ointment:

Her sins are forgiven, for she loved much... Thy faith has saved thee (Luke 7:47, 50).

From this it is evident that when sins have been remitted or forgiven, thus when they exist no longer, faith saves....

Doctrine of Life 52. From these premises there follows this conclusion: That no man has in him a grain of truth more than he has of good; thus that he does not have a grain of faith more than he has of life. In the understanding indeed there may exist the thought that such or such a thing is true, but not the acknowledgment which is faith, unless there is consent to it in the

will. Thus faith and life keep step as they walk. From all this it is now evident that in proportion as anyone shuns evils as sins, in the same proportion he has faith and is spiritual.

Anointing with oil

AR 779:3. It was a received custom to anoint themselves and others to testify gladness and benevolence of mind; but with common oil or some other noble oil, but not with the oil of holiness (Matt. 6:17; Mark 6:13; Luke 7:46; Isa. 61:3; Amos 6:6; Micah 6:15; Ps. 92:10; 104:15; Dan. 10:3; Deut. 28:40). That it was not permitted to anoint themselves or others with the oil of holiness, see Exod. 30:32-33.

Questions and Comments

1. When we can see how much the Lord forgives us, does it help us love Him more?
2. How does repenting help us love the Lord more?
3. How are sins being forgiven and faith connected according to Doctrine of Life 51-52?

Day Six: The Pharisee and the Publican

Luke 18:9-14

And He said also this parable to certain who trusted in themselves that they were just, and made the rest as nothing: Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican.

The Pharisee, standing to himself, prayed these things: God, I thank Thee that I am not as the rest of men—rapacious, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all things, as many as I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, was not willing to lift up even his eyes to heaven, but struck on his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I say to you, This man came down justified into his house than⁴ the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.

The first state of regeneration

AE 794:4. Here is described the first state of the regeneration of the man of this church after temptation. This state is common to all who are being regenerated, namely, that they suppose they do what is good and think what is true from themselves. And because they are as yet in great obscurity, the Lord also leaves them so to imagine. But still all the good they do and all the truth they think, while in such imagination, is not the good and truth of faith. For whatever man produces of himself cannot be good, because it is from himself, that is, from a fountain which is impure and most

⁴ The Greek does not indicate whether this is “more than” or “rather than”; neither does the Latin translation of the Greek in the Heavenly Doctrine. AC 6405:3 says that “the Pharisee also went down justified, because he had done works from obedience to command,” but Life 30:3 and AE 794:2 indicate that he was not justified. For this reason the ambiguity is preserved in this translation.

unclean. From this impure and unclean fountain no good can ever go forth, for the man is always thinking of his own merit and righteousness; and some go so far as to despise others in comparison with themselves (as the Lord teaches in Luke 18:9-14), and others err in other ways. Man's own cupidities intermingle themselves, so that while it appears outwardly to be good, it is inwardly filthy. For this reason the good which man does in this state is not the good of faith, and the case is the same with the truth that he thinks. For although that which he thinks may be very true, yet so long as it is from what is his own, it is indeed in itself the truth of faith, but the good of faith is not in it; and all truth, in order to be the truth of faith, must have in it from the Lord the good of faith. Then for the first time there are good and truth.

Goods from self

Doctrine of Life 30:3. That no one is saved by means of goods from self, because they are not good, is evident from the following: Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out demons, and in Thy name done many mighty things? But then I will profess to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23). Then you shall begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us; and you shall begin to say, We ate and drank in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. But He shall say, I tell you, I do not know you, where you are from; depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity (Luke 13:25-27). For such persons are like the Pharisee, who stood in the temple and prayed, saying that he was not as other men, an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer; that he fasted twice in the week, and gave tithes of all that he possessed (Luke 18:11-14).

Works alone

AC 6405:3. By "Gad" are also signified those who make all salvation consist in works alone, like the Pharisee... in the parable... thus holding external [deeds] as the veriest truths. Those who are like this are also in the Lord's kingdom, but on the threshold, and therefore the Lord says, "I say to you, the publican

went down to his house justified more than the Pharisee” (Luke 18:14), thus that the Pharisee also went down justified, because he had done works from obedience to command. In a word, by Gad are represented those who call that truth which is not truth, and from this non-truth do works. Hence their works are like their [non] truths, for works are nothing but the will and understanding in act. That which saves these men is the intention to do what is good, and something of innocence in their ignorance.

Questions and Comments

1. Is it ever good to compare ourselves to another person like the Pharisee in this parable?
2. How do we move from doing good from ourselves to doing good from the Lord?
3. AC 6405:3 describes those in a state like the Pharisee as being on the threshold of the Lord’s kingdom because of their “intention to do what is good and something of innocence in their ignorance.” What do you make of this?