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## THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER: LITERARY AND HISTORY CRITICISM FROM LUKE 15:11-32

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### Abstrak

The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 is a passage that is often discussed. The discussion is usually directed to the youngest who realizes his mistake and then returns to his father. The response of the father who hugged the youngest back from his escape drew anger from the eldest. After the story, the reader will close it and take the implications that can be learned from the parable. However, there is another aspect that deserves to be studied, especially regarding the deepest meaning of the parable. This study aims to explain the meaning of the parable of the prodigal son. The research method used is biblical literary and history criticism. The results showed that the meaning of the prodigal son was not only directed to the youngest. But to the eldest who does not understand his father's heart towards those who return from his loss. Thus, what is missing in this parable is the eldest, not the youngest.

**Key words:** parable; Literary; History; Criticism; Luke 15:11-32

### Abstrak

*Perumpamaan tentang anak yang hilang dalam Lukas 15:11-32 adalah bagian yang sering dibahas. Pembicaraan biasanya ditujukan kepada si bungsu yang menyadari kesalahannya dan kemudian kembali kepada ayahnya. Tanggapan ayah yang memeluk si bungsu dari pelariannya mengundang kemarahan si sulung. Setelah cerita, pembaca akan menutupnya dan mengambil implikasi yang dapat dipelajari dari perumpamaan tersebut. Namun, ada aspek lain yang patut dipelajari, terutama mengenai makna terdalam dari perumpamaan tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan makna perumpamaan tentang anak yang hilang. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kritik sastra dan sejarah biblika. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna anak yang hilang tidak hanya ditujukan kepada anak bungsu. Tetapi kepada yang tertua yang tidak mengerti hati ayahnya terhadap orang-orang yang kembali dari kehilangannya. Jadi, yang hilang dalam perumpamaan ini adalah yang tertua, bukan yang termuda.*

**Kata kunci:** perumpamaan; Sastra; Sejarah; Kritik; Lukas 15:11-32

## INTRODUCTION

The method of teaching with many parables Jesus did so that each of his teachings could be understood by listeners at that time. Imagery helps a person understand a fundamental value that needs to be done. Therefore, parables should make the listener or student understand, not confuse (Amos Hosea, 2019; Sugiono & Hardori, 2020).

One of the parables Jesus told was about the prodigal son. This parable seems to stand alone without any other parables (Pantan, 2016). However, when investigated, this parable has unity with the two previous parables, namely the coin and the lost sheep. That's why, Merrill C. Tenney, said that through this parable, like through the two previous parables (about the lost sheep and about the lost coin – Luke 15:1-10), Jesus showed God's attitude toward sinners (Tenney, 2001, p. 266). This is also emphasized by James Montgomery Boice who argues that the lost sheep, lost coin, and the prodigal son represent the condition of people who are separated from God, namely people who have not

been saved (unbelievers) (Boice, 2001).

The meaning given is usually only limited to the loss of the youngest child (Marbun, 2019). The youngest child is described as a believer who squanders freedom in Jesus with the pleasures of the world. However, studies of the eldest are rarely carried out. Whereas in the passage it is said that this parable concerns the prodigal son, not the lost youngest child.

The success of understanding this parable will have an impact on how Christians hold their faith and believe in Jesus. Therefore, this study aims to critically examine the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The research specifically conducts a literal study and historical criticism in order to extract the real meaning of this parable.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive study and the data were collected and analyzed and then described using the words (Chandra, 2019). There are two studies conducted in understanding the parable of the prodigal son. First, literal criticism. The use of this

method is so that the meaning of the original language of the New Testament (Greek) can be understood. Meanwhile, history criticism wants to reveal the context of events at that time and how it was used in history (Wasino & Hartatik, 2018).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Literary Criticism**

The canonical gospels contain at least three literary genres, such as narration, parables, miracles, and announcements or statements. Luke 15: 11-32 is a parable genre - so it must be interpreted or treated as parables.

Jeffrey D. Arthurs said, "The parables that Jesus told travelled through the everyday life of the ancient Near Eastern world. The stories are real. However, these stories are often exaggerated. The parable is not a fairy tale. Parables are concrete stories that use the secular world to communicate spiritual truth" (Arthurs, 2007, p. 147) That is, the stories that appear in the parables of the Lord Jesus are stories taken from real events in the life of ancient Near Eastern societies at that time (such as: in Palestine); so that people who hear

His parable will immediately understand and recognize the story in the parable.

Klein, Blomberg, Robert emphasized, "We take a step forward by appreciating parables as fictional narratives. More extended examples of this genre (novels or short stories) generally communicate meaning through the main characters. They encourage readers to identify themselves with one or more of the characters shown and immerse themselves in the storyline that is shown through different points of view. What Klein and friends have argued with Arthurs is not contradictory. After all, even though the content of parables conveyed by God originates from folk tales or real events in society at that time; however, it is later understood as a fictional narrative because every character or character in it describes something outside of itself (Klein et al., 2017).

Because a parable can also be seen as a narrative-although it is not a pure narrative, it means that the parable also has a plot, characters, settings and points of view. However, this research will only focus on the perspective of the characters or

figures contained in the passage of Luke 15: 11-32, namely: the Father, the Youngest and the Eldest.

### **History Criticism**

This research focuses more on the three main characters or characters in this passage, but that does not mean ignoring the narrative form. Blomberg said, the parable may also be divided into three parts, almost as naturally as the two-part division noted earlier. Thus verses 11-19 narrate the departure of the younger son from the father, with the focus on the product's profligacy; verses 20-24 present the product's return to his father, with the focus on the father's welcome; and verses 25-32 depict the older brother's reaction to his father, with the focus on the older brother's resentment (Blomberg, 2004). It's same with (Hultgen, 2000)

That is, for Blomberg, this parable is divided into three parts, namely: first, verses 11-19, which focus on obscenity abundant; second, verses 20-24, which focus on the father's speech; and third, verses 25-32 which focus on the anger of the firstborn (Blomberg, 2004, pp. 73–74).

At the beginning of the passage, the Gospel writer Luke opens the text by writing, "Jesus speaks again." The phrase is a fragment from verse 11, which explains that Jesus is returning to discuss another topic. It seems that in a warm and challenging discussion with the parties involved in this discussion, Jesus seemed like a lecturer who was giving a case study to students, as an illustration, to put forward a view or argument. Jesus seemed still not satisfied with the explanations that had been given previously.

What was the conflict? The topic cannot be separated from the previous verses, which are believed to have been compiled by the author of Luke as a response to the conflict. The fact that Jesus' fellowship at the table "with tax collectors and sinners" angered the righteous among the "Pharisees and scribes," as Luke reports in this context, 15: 1-2. That means the parables which are later told throughout this chapter, have a very close relationship with the two groups that are told in verses 1-2. The first group is the tax collectors and sinners, and the second group is the Pharisees and the scribes (Jeremias, 1972).

In verse 12, after the youngest asked for an inheritance from his father. The Greek word translated treasure is the word *bios*, which means "life" (Hultgen, 2000). If this is the case, then we can imply that the youngest asks his father to tear his life apart, his father gives his life (the best part of him) as the most valuable treasure to his son. Moreover, the father did it because he loved his son. Therefore, verse 12 very beautifully describes the Lord Jesus, who was willing to sacrifice Himself for His people (Keller, 2014, pp. 14–19).

Verse 13 then continues with the negative attitude of the youngest child. The word "squandered" (RSV) comes from the adjective *ἀσώτως*; which in the NIV translation is translated by the word "wild" (reckless); or in the NAS translation with the word "loose" (free); and in the KJV translation with the word "riotous" (wild/irregular); and all of the above translations give negative connotations. Meanwhile, Bauer-Danker itself gives meaning to the word *ἀσώτως* wastefully and prodigally; which can be understood as an extravagant attitude to life (Kistemaker, 2002).

The scholars believed that when Luke used this word to describe the youngest's life when he left the house, he wanted to emphasize a wasteful or shaky life (KR.Pakpahan, 2019). Although the use of this word in Titus 1: 6 and 1 Peter 4: 4 emphasizes the chaotic aspects of life or acts that violate regulations or laws (Kistemaker, 2002).

In verses 14-15, it is said that "He had spent everything, a great famine and he began to be in want"; as a result, he was looking for a job. In the Greek text, the word *πορευθεῖς ἐκολλήθη* is used. The word *πορευθεῖς* is the single masculine nominative passive aorist form *πορεύομαι*. Meanwhile, the word *ἐκολλήθη* is an indicative form of the passive third person singular aorist from the word *κολλάομαι*. According to Wallace, this is a form of passive causative or permissive. Added by Wallace, causative or passive permissive, as is familiar with the medium, implies permission, consent, or the cause or reason for the verb's action on the subject part (Wallace, 1996). The use of this form is rare, usually closed to the imperative (as one would expect because the imperative essentially involves

desire). It is difficult to decide whether what the passive form has given is cause or permission. Therefore, the two categories are combined for pragmatic reasons. So when it is said that he went to work, the phrase contained permissive or causative meaning, where the youngest himself allowed or caused himself to go and work in one of the city's residents where he lived at that time.

However, the job obtained by the youngest is the lowest, namely: taking care of swine. According to Kistemaker, he is going down very deep because he was taught as a Jew since his childhood that pigs are dirty animals (Lev. 11: 7). He worked for the Gentiles, and thus he could not worship on the Sabbath. In this sad situation, he was cut off from the religion of his ancestors. His employer made him feel that the pigs were worth more than workers like him (Kistemaker, 2002, p. 237). Based on Kistemaker's comments above, it can be said that the youngest is not only experiencing physical problems - but there is a much more serious problem, namely: regarding his relationship with God. He fell entirely into the darkness of sin.

When she realized her situation, she was ready to go home and confess her every sin to Allah, even her father's mistake. The youngest decided to return to his father, and when he was still far away, the father saw him and was moved with pity. Here the youngest is not said to have returned to his village or his house; instead, it is said that the youngest returned to his father.

The father's response is here that is in the spotlight because the father is not supposed to do that, namely: running to get his son. Keller said, "according to the general rule at the time, a good Middle Eastern family head should not run. Children can run, women can run, young people, can run. However, the head of the family, the dignified pillar of society, the rich landowner should not run (Wiryohadi et al., 2021). He would not take up his robe and run barefoot like a child. However, this one father did an unusual thing. He ran towards his son and showed his feelings openly, hugged him and kissed him" (Keller, 2014, p. 16).

Morris compares the kiss that the father gives the youngest to David's kiss, which signifies the forgiveness he gives to his son

Ablasom (2 Sam. 14:33). Added by Morris, the final verb *κατεφίλησεν* probably means 'to kiss him many times' or 'to kiss him gently.' Even if there is no special significance, at least the verb *κατεφίλησεν* denotes a sincere greeting or is sincere otherwise not a pretense. Even to express his great love for his son, he had to break the habit that should be done by the head of the noble family of that era by running to welcome the return of the child he loved so dearly (Leon Morris, 1996).

However, before delivering it, it turned out that his father interrupted his words (Pantan, 2016). In verses 22-24, the father instructs the servants to give his son a festive welcome. The speech was expressed in two ways, namely: (1) changing the clothes of the youngest, and (2) preparing for a festive party. The father's command is characterized by the use of four verbs in the imperative mode, namely: (1) fast, bring (*ἐξενέγκατε*) out the best robe<sup>23</sup>; (2) put (*ἐνδύσατε*) on him; (3) give (*δότε*) rings on her hands and shoes on her feet; (4) bring a fat calf, then slaughter it (*θύσατε*), and we eat while rejoicing and we eat joyfully. The best robe in the house must have been his father's robe, an indisputable

proof that the youngest's status is being or has been restored in the family (Gratia, 2020). The ring indicates that the youngest is again recognized as a family member. Then the shoes worn on his feet indicated that the youngest was now a free man. Because a slave and the poor do not wear shoes. As the main dish at the youngest welcoming party, the fat calf shows that it is a special feast.

Furthermore, there are two things that the firstborn in verses 25-32 did that showed his hardness. First, the eldest son refused to attend the party the father had arranged (Sirait, 2021). Second, she scolded her father for feeling that he had been favouritism or loved his younger brother more than he did.

Because of his hardness of heart, the eldest son, who always thinks of himself as right, sees or judges himself as a servant, not as a child. This is evident in the statement of the firstborn in verse 29. The word *δουλεύω* for the context of Luke 15:29 can be understood as doing or behaving himself as a person in total service to others, performing the duties of a slave, a servant. It turns out that the eldest son only sees himself as a slave, servant or servant of his

father, so he cannot understand his father's actions in expressing his love for the youngest and even for himself.

This uncontrolled roaming led the eldest son to insult his father in the disrespectful way a young man should be in the day's culture - especially in public (Gratia, 2020). As Keller put it, "He does not address 'my respected father,' but immediately rebukes him, 'Look!' - which is the same as saying, 'Hey, daddy, look!'. In a culture that places great importance on being respectful and respectful of elders, that kind of attitude is too much" (Keller, 2014, p. 20).

Based on the information from verses 31-32, it can be seen clearly that the father still shows his love for his eldest son. Even though the eldest son had humiliated him, disrespected him and even refused to attend the party the youngest had held. When the firstborn saw himself not as a son but only as a slave, the father keeps calling him and still calls him a son. Alternatively, when his son refuses to think of him as a father; on the contrary, he still regards them as the children he loves.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 Jesus refers not only to one side of the life of the sinner who is described as the youngest son. But to people who already understand religion widely, but do not accept sinners who admit their guilt. They are likened to a religious drunken group. Religion is only seen as an organization or group to punish those who sin.

In everyday life, love should be prioritized over judgment. Judgmental business is an easy job to do. Especially if there are standard rules that are held from year to year and are written neatly. Therefore, viewing other people as fellow human beings must be improved.

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