

Literary Analysis: The Parable of the Prodigal Son

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The Parable of the Prodigal Son is a religious story that reflects upon human sins and acts of forgiveness. There are three parables, “The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and the Lost or Prodigal Son,” which are introduced in the biblical scripture. These parables have their distinctive storylines and convey a moral lesson from a religious perspective. The parable of the Prodigal Son conveys a distinctive biblical lesson of repentance and forgiveness for sinners. The themes of forgiveness and sin are reflected through the characters used in the story. There are various literary elements that convey the prominent theme and moral lesson of this story. The prime focus of this literary analysis is to unveil the literary elements that accentuate the importance of forgiveness and repentance in this story. The characters and the background of this story reflect the biblical lesson of forgiving sinners after repentance. This story functions upon figurative analysis to convey its moral lesson and prominent theme. This paper will examine the Parable of the Prodigal Son within the limelight of two literary elements: characters and metaphorical language, which accentuate the main theme of the story.

The plot of this story revolves around a person who has two sons. The younger son asks for his share of the property and leaves his family. The younger brother starts to live with his friends. He wastes all his share of money on his friends and becomes poor. He starts to take care of the herd of pigs. After going through such harsh conditions, he realizes his mistakes and goes back to his father. He asks for forgiveness, and his father forgives him wholeheartedly. The father prepares a grand feast for the return of his son. However, the elder brother is not ready to forgive and accept him. The elder brother questions his father. The father tells the importance of his prodigal brother’s return from a sinful life and gives him the lesson of forgiveness.

The background and the setting of this biblical story have immense importance in conveying the thematic meaning of the story. The background of the story is set for the first-century reign of a Jewish religious leader. The Pharisees and Scribes, among the Jewish leaders, criticized the people who interacted with the sinners. The setting of the story envisages the Jewish culture and society, where the sinners were never accepted back into society. Similarly, in the story, the elder brother “was not pleased and he thought that the younger brother had not behaved badly and left his father’s house” (Luke 15:11-32). This story is written for the reason of the strict cultural norms against sinners who were never forgiven. God has given immense importance to the act of forgiveness and letting things go if the person has repented. However, in the Jewish culture, the person who has committed any type of sin is never forgiven. When Jesus Christ sat with the sinners who had repented their mistakes, the Jewish people criticized them. There was no concept of forgiveness in this culture. In the respective story, the elder brother is not happy to see his young prodigal brother back and forgiven.

He negatively views the return of his brother and is not ready to accept him wholeheartedly.

The traditional character of the father plays a significant role in this story. The character of the father reflects the figure of God. In this parable, the father is the reflection of the whole biblical lesson. The father forgives his son just like God forgives his people. Whenever a person commits a wrongful act or a sin, God is always waiting for him to ask for forgiveness. God forgives his man without any doubt and wholeheartedly accepts him back.

Similarly, in this story, the father forgives his younger son when he is on his way back home to ask for forgiveness. "The father felt so sorry for his son that he ran out to meet him. He hugged him and took him home. He did not scold his son for all the bad things he had done" (Luke 15:11-32). These lines validate the emotional state of the father, who is waiting for his son to come back. He readily accepts his son and takes him home. The traditional character of the father signifies that fathers always forgive their children, no matter what they have done. In this biblical story, God is reflected through the Father. God is always waiting for his children to return to him. The love of God can be reflected through the anxiousness and eagerness of the father who hugs his son when "He was still a long way off from his home when his father saw him" (Luke 15:11-32). The line signifies that God is always willing and eager for his children to come back to him and ask for forgiveness. Even though the younger son is still on his way back to ask for forgiveness (he has not arrived yet), his father sees him from a distance and embraces him with all his heart. God always forgives his children if they ask for forgiveness. Furthermore, the character of the father also gives a lesson to his elder brother to share the joy of his brother's return and repentance. The father wants his elder son to accept his younger son and take part in celebrating the festivities. This action reflects that God is asking his people to accept the people who have committed sins (sinners) wholeheartedly because the act of repentance and forgiveness is greater than the act of sinning.

The younger brother, who is also known as "the Prodigal Son," reflects all the followers of God who sin. The younger son says, "Father, give me my share of all you have" (Luke 15:11-32). The first sin he commits is to separate himself from his father after getting his share of the property. After taking his share of the property, "The friends he chose were bad and taught him to do many evil things. He lived there for a long time, trying to enjoy himself by doing many wicked things" (Luke 15:11-32). After getting separated from his family, he indulges in extravagant activities with negative friends. He loses all his wealth in such extravagant activities and becomes poor. He gets a job of taking care of the herd of pigs. This job signifies the punishment he has received for his sins. According to the biblical scriptures, taking care of pigs is the filthiest, worst, and lowest job anyone could get. The younger son receives and bears his punishment through this job. After going through such miserable conditions, the younger brother decides to seek forgiveness from his father, just like a man who decides to ask forgiveness from God. The prodigal son starts his journey of coming back to his home to his father, and throughout, he kept "thinking all the way how he would ask for forgiveness from his good father" (Luke 15:11-32). This represents his journey of repentance and baptism after sinning. He comes back to his spiritual essence, his God. He is amazed to see that his father has accepted him wholeheartedly after committing so many sins. The feast signifies the joy of his father and God when

his son comes back to him. Furthermore, it also signifies the importance of forgiveness in religion.

The character of the elder brother signifies the Jewish society and the higher religious officials who were against the act of forgiveness. The elder brother in the story is not ready to accept his younger brother's return and refuses to join their celebration. He thinks about his good deeds and support for his father and his younger brother, leaving his father. However, he fails to acknowledge the suffering his brother has gone through. All he thinks about is his sin. The elder brother thinks that "Had not the younger brother behaved badly and left his father's house while he, the older brother, stayed at home like a good son and did all the work? (Luke 15:11-32). Similarly, society always saw sinners as eternally damned beings who cannot gain blessings and be forgiven by God. At that time, the religious people also showed a negative response towards the people who had sinned. Therefore, this story provides a moral lesson for such people who do not accept the repentance of the sinners.

The use of literary elements like metaphor amplifies the moral lesson. The father says to his elder son, "Today we are glad because your brother was like one dead, and he is alive again; he was like one lost, and he is found again. (Luke 15:11-32). The father uses words like "lost, found, dead, and alive" for his son, who was sinful once (dead and lost), and now he has repented (alive and found). These metaphorical associations of the younger son accentuate the main theme of the story about a sinful person and a forgiven person. According to the biblical scripture, the father says, "Bring the best clothes for my son. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Prepare the very best dinner for us. We shall have a feast and be happy because my son who was lost is found again (Luke 15:11-32)". The ring, shoes, and clothes are used as metaphorical objects that reflect that God has forgiven his son and has given his rightful status back to him. The vivid imagery shows that the father asks his servants to bring the best facilities and luxuries for his son, who has returned to seek forgiveness and repentance. This signifies the importance of forgiveness and repentance in religion.

In a nutshell, Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son explicates the importance of forgiveness and repentance through a short moral lesson. The archetypal characters of the elder son, younger son, and their father reflect upon substantial themes of rebellion, the act of sin, punishment, and the act of forgiveness. The younger son represents the sinner who is asking for forgiveness. The Elder son represents the society that judges the younger son and is not ready to accept him. The father represents God, who is merciful and gracious to wholeheartedly accept his son (sinner) as he seeks forgiveness. This literary analysis focuses on the moral lesson of repentance and forgiveness after sinning/ rebellion from society. The prominent literary elements that emphasize the story's major theme are the archetypal characters and the metaphorical language used in the story. Without such literary elements, the story would not have accomplished its motive and successful place in the biblical scriptures.

Works Cited

"Bible Gateway Passage: Luke 15:11-32 – New International Version." *Bible Gateway*,

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