

short stories by jesus

THE ENIGMATIC PARABLES OF A CONTROVERSIAL RABBI

BY AJ (Amy-Jill) LEVINE

WHO IS AJ LEVINE?

- Vanderbilt University
 - Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies
 - Mary Jane Werthan Professor in Jewish Studies
 - Professor of New Testament Studies
- University of Glasgow - Alexander Robertson Fellow
- Catholic Biblical Association Scholar to the Philippines
- Spring 2019 - the first Jew to teach New Testament at Rome's Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- *“A self-described Yankee Jewish feminist, Professor Levine is a member of Congregation Sherith Israel, an Orthodox Synagogue in Nashville, although she is often quite unorthodox.”* Vanderbilt Divinity School



Putting the lesson in perspective...

- Levine writes, “What makes the parables mysterious, or difficult is that they challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, our own lives.”
- She knows that leaving a text open to multiple interpretations may make us uncomfortable, but that may be the inherent value of the parables...
- She reminds us “Jesus is not a ‘one size fits all’ teacher: some people he called to abandon everything; others he asked to provide hospitality ...he...granted...healing or forgiveness;...he asked [others] to remember his teachings. Paul...tells us that different people have different callings and different gifts. THEREFORE, we should expect to see different things in the parables.”
- Levine says that religion is designed to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable...thus the parables were not written to give us assurance, but to afflict us. They challenge us to look deeper...
- To search our hearts and to learn something about others.

LOST SHEEP, LOST COIN, LOST SON

- What are these parables about?
- Could they be about our responsibilities to make everyone feel counted?
- Whom do we count? Who is counted in our society? Why are they counted?



Luke 15

- Luke 15:1-2
- *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*
 - Why would Luke set up the stories with this scenario?
- Luke 3-31
- The 3 parables are told together because Jesus was making a point that he considered important enough to reiterate it over and over again.
 - What is the point Jesus is making?

Watch DVD

- Pay attention to the renaming of the parables...
 - The Shepherd Who Lost His Sheep
 - The Woman Who Lost Her Coin
 - The Father Who lost His Son(s)... "There was a father who had two sons"...

God does not lose us!

- Levine makes this point early in her presentation.
- Is it significant...why or why not?
- Levine suggests that the parable of the lost son actually focuses on the older brother. He is the one who was *not counted*.
 - How does this perspective change your view of the story?
 - Of Cain, Ishmael, Esau?
 - Of your place in your family?
- For understanding or love of others, must we seek repentance and forgiveness?
- What is most important in our relationships?
- Searching is *work*, but in the searching and the potential of finding what happens?
- *Do we count? Do we make sure everyone feels counted?*

Isaiah 40:26

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created these?

*He who brings out the starry host one by one and
calls forth each of them by name.*

*Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.*

Amen.