Amir Tsarfati
Explore the Bible with Dr. Rick Yohn
The Parable of the Prodigal Son

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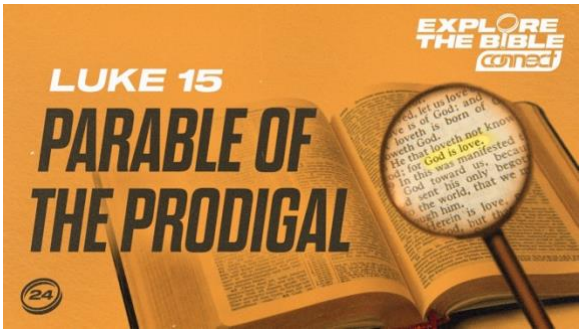

AMIR: Hey, Shalom everyone, I'm Amir Tsarfati, back from CONNECT in Galilee, in the Jezreel Valley in Israel. And today we are so glad to be back on track with our *Explore the Bible* program. And together with me, as always, Dr. Pastor Rick Yohn. Shalom my friend, Rick, how are you?

RICK: Shalom, Amir, I'm doing fine. I'll tell you, the Lord has been teaching me so much as I've been in the Scriptures day after day. And my heart just overflows with joy as to the things that He's teaching me. And it's great for us to get back, I mean, it's been quite a while!

AMIR: It is, and I think that between the last program and this one, you actually celebrated your 89th birthday; am I right?

RICK: 89 years old and still climbing in the rocks and the hills. And the Lord has blessed me with health, and I take my little Neo 2 drone out and go out to the canyon and climb around the hills, and let that little drone follow me from the back, from the side and from the front. I just love technology and so that's what I do every once in a while during the week, just to get out in God's country, and I just love His creation.

AMIR: And you know, when I connect your birthday to how you started by saying that you keep studying, and you keep learning so many new things, that's an encouragement to so many people

that may even be way younger than you, that at any given age, there is no point where you can say, "That's it, I know everything." In fact, the more advanced you are in age, the more you find out that there is so much more to learn. And I want to literally encourage people not to ever think that they're too old to learn or study the Bible. In fact, maybe at this point in your life, this is the best point in your life to start digging deep. Maybe you are more ready for it, and Dr. Steve Yohn has been not only studying but also teaching the Bible. For how many years have you been teaching the Bible?

RICK: You're talking, when you just mentioned Steve, I think you meant me.

AMIR: Oh, did I say Steve?

RICK: Yeah, you said Steve.

AMIR: No, I said Dr. Rick Yohn, I'm sorry. Dr. Rick Yohn has been teaching the Bible. How many years have you been teaching the Bible, Dr. Rick?

RICK: Since the age of 18, so it's been a while.

AMIR: So obviously, for more than 70 years, you've been teaching, not just studying the Bible, and yet, here at the age of 89, you're saying, "I'm still learning so much every day."

RICK: I think I've learned more in the last three or four years than in all the previous years. And what we're looking at today, I've taught, I've preached, and I go back to it and it's like, "I didn't see that before. Man, oh man, I just missed all this." And God's just been so good, opening my eyes and my mind and my heart to discover more and more. And that's what I want our viewers to do, just open those Scriptures and allow the Spirit of God to open your eyes to see new things.

AMIR: Yeah, so why don't we do that first with you praying for everyone. And then we'll dig into our chapter today, which is rather a very unique one, as we are going to look into the parables of Jesus. So, Dr. Rick, do us the honor.

RICK: We just thank You once again to be able to get into the Scriptures and allow Your Holy Spirit to have us see things that we haven't seen before. Even though we've gone over some of these passages time and time again, there's so much more for us to learn. And I pray that during this time that we will just allow Your Spirit to give us insights that we have not seen before. Thank You for what You're going to accomplish today, in Jesus' name, Amen.

AMIR: Yeah, well, I want to tell you before we start, I'm thankful every day for you, for your family, and for the fact that God had put us together because you guys, you personally have taught me so much. And together, God put us together to touch the lives of millions through books that are bestsellers. And this is something that is above and beyond whatever we as humans could have done. There is no doubt that God is in it and there's no doubt that God is blessing it. We see the evidence of it. So thank you for being a spring that continues to flow more and more. And once again, we have the opportunity to guide our viewers in how to study the Bible for themselves. And we've talked about interpreting the Bible historically, literally and biographically. But how are we going to approach the Bible today, Dr. Rick?

RICK: Well, I think that approaching the Bible through parables is just something that will really open your eyes. I mean, we all love stories, and that's what a parable is. A parable, it comes from two Greek words, *pará*, which means "alongside of" and *bállō* means "to cast." And so a parable is a truth or a principle that comes along with a story. And what is so interesting is to see the reaction of those who are listening to the story. Because, again, it's like a "zap!" for some of them who are listening.

AMIR: Definitely.

RICK: And wonderful.

AMIR: Now, what should we be looking for as we read those parables?

RICK: Well, the first thing I look for is context. What is the setting? Where is Jesus in His ministry at the time He told this parable? And who is the audience? Who are those who are listening to the parable? And why did He say it at this time? And so to not only look at the parable, but to go to a few chapters beforehand to find out where is the Lord at this time? Where is He headed? And why does He talk about this story at this specific time?

AMIR: Okay, so we're talking about context, audience, occasion. What about the cultural background probably also?

RICK: Definitely the cultural background, because there are things that we don't know about as *goyim*, [Laughter] as the Gentiles. And we have to look at the background, cultural background, as well as the historical background and everything else. And this is one of the things that the Lord has been laying on my heart, is to look at the historical background in particular, the when, as well as the why. And any time you get into the Word of God, really look in terms of the when. We ask the questions: who, what, when, where, and why, and often we forget the when. So that's what we're going to look at this morning.

AMIR: I see. Now, is there anything we need to avoid when we are dealing with parables?

RICK: Well, one of the things to avoid is not to look at every little detail and try to draw some kind of a principle. A parable has one major principle that the Lord is trying to get across, not 15 different principles, but one major principle. And we'll look at that in this passage of Scripture today.

AMIR: All right, so let's do it, Pastor Rick. What parable will we be looking at today?

RICK: Well, we'll turn to Luke chapter 15. And a very familiar, parable. But before we look at the parable itself, where is Jesus at this time? And we find that Jesus is in the process of—ever since the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus is headed toward Jerusalem. And He knows what He is

going to experience in Jerusalem. The disciples have no idea, even though He tells them time and again, the Son of Man is going to be rejected, He's going to be crucified, He's going to be buried. And it just goes right over the heads of the disciples. So they are in Perea. Now, where is Perea? And Amir, why don't you fill us in on the geographical location of what's going on? Why is it... Perea?

AMIR: Perea is the other side of the Jordan River where Jordan is today. So basically, we're talking about the journey that He will be taking on the King's Highway, all the way down south in order to then cross the river and make His way up to Jerusalem. So that's the region over there, up north, but on the other side of the Jordan River.

RICK: So why did Jesus keep going on the other side? Because one time we know in John chapter 4, it said He had to go through Samaria. So can you fill us in on that?

AMIR: Yeah, most Jewish people would avoid contact with Samaritans in Samaria, simply because the Samaritans thought they're the real Jews and the Jewish people did not agree with them. Samaritan's thought Mount Gerizim is where they should be having a temple and worship the Lord, where the Jewish people had Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. So, the dispute between the two groups caused such tension that most Jewish people will avoid having on the way. And it was also easier to walk on the other side geographically as you walk through the valley mostly, whereas through Samaria you will walk through mountains. And so again, for several reasons, it would make more sense. Again, you have to understand in those days, it didn't mean an Arab, hostile territory that they had to avoid. It was not so. It maybe even would be considered more hostile to do it through Samaria to some degree. So again, Jewish people preferred to do it on that route, the King's Highway, which is along the Jordan Valley.

RICK: And wasn't it in Samaria where James and John, the sons of thunder, wanted to call down fire upon the people there?

AMIR: Yep. So it tells you a lot about that place. [RICK: Chuckles. "It does"] And it also tells you how surprised the Samaritan woman was when Jesus actually did approach that area. She was super-shocked and that tells you... and then of course, for Him to say "Salvation is of the Jews" was a bold statement on His side to say it right there. And so yeah, definitely, definitely there was a reason why Jesus had to go there. There's a reason why He had to say the things He had to say there. But again, when it comes to a journey all the way to Jerusalem, not for the sake of teaching or making a statement, such as the one with the woman from Samaria, but the pure journey from the north to Jerusalem, from the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem, they always prefer the Jordan Valley.

RICK: And Jesus knew what He was about to face and the disciples had no idea, even though He told them. And so, let's look at the audience and I'm going to ask our viewers [to] get a pen or pencil or whatever and be willing to mark up your Bible. Now, I have a brand-new Bible. It is heavy. You can see it's a...

AMIR: ...That's mine. [Gesture: lifts bible for viewing]

RICK: So much that you are. Yeah. And it took me a while to be willing to get color pens and actually mark it. But now I'm just going through the Scriptures and marking up as I go along. And there are things that you should really look at and perhaps even mark in your Bible. Who is the audience? So before you look at that, why don't we read this parable? And Amir, why don't you start with—Actually, there are two parables before the one we're going to get to.

AMIR: Exactly. There is the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. And then comes the parable we want to talk about, which is the prodigal son, basically.

RICK: Right. So why don't you read (Luke 15) verses 11 through 21.

AMIR: 21. Okay. **"[11] Then He said: 'A certain man had two sons. [12] And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So he divided to them his livelihood. [13] And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. [14] But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. [15] Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. [16] And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. [17] But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, [19] and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" [20] And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. [21] And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." [22] But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. [23] And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; [24] for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to be merry.'" (Luke 15: 11-24)** Wow.

RICK: And then there's this word 'meanwhile' and a very important word, 'meanwhile'. "...his older son was in the field."

AMIR: Oh, do you want me to continue?

RICK: Yeah, why don't you just go ahead and finish it.

AMIR: Okay, **"[25] 'Now...'"** or meanwhile, **"[25] ... 'his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. [26] So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. [27] And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf." [28] But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. [29] So he answered and said to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. [30] But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him." [31] And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. [32] It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."'"**

RICK: What a contrast between brothers. What I want our viewers to do now, if you don't mind marking up your Bible, is to look at verse 1 of [Luke] chapter 15 because here is the audience. And Jesus is speaking to two groups of people. We are told, **"[1] Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus."** (Luke 15:1 NIV). These were the people who knew they had a need. No matter what they did to fill themselves with pleasure and whatever it was they were filling themselves with, they were still empty on the inside. The other group that was there were the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. And what were they doing? They were muttering. They were grumbling. [Rick imitates their grumbling, muttering] They saw Jesus, "Oh, that guy." And so Jesus, knowing their hearts, tells three parables. And in each parable something is lost and then found, and then there's rejoicing. So, that's what these three parables have in common.

AMIR: Correct.

RICK: Something lost, found and everybody rejoicing because the lost has been found.

AMIR: It's funny because—before you continue, isn't it amazing that Jesus is not trying to paint reality and daily life as perfect? And in fact, He's telling people, look, it's fine if you think that religion can save you, but the reality is that people cannot be perfect, and they'll always have an issue. And God is always there with His open arms to receive them when they understand and repent and run back to Him. So it's amazing that God is more realistic than the people who claim to know Him and serve Him. Yeah.

RICK: But very much so. And then in verse 13, you might want to underline that word "distant country" because... or a far country. The prodigal went to a far country. Amir, what is that far country that he would have gone to? When it talks about a distant country or a far country, it's more, I think He is talking more than distance.

AMIR: Yeah, I think that,

RICK: To me...

AMIR: ...yeah, I think it's you and I were in the Sea of Galilee. I guided you around. And when, for example, when we looked at the Sea of Galilee, I remember I told you, "the other side." And when Jesus said, "Let's go to the other side" and we always... and remember I told you 'the other side' was not just geographically the other side, but the whole world on the other side was different. It was 'other people' who were worshiping 'other gods' who were raising the 'other thing.' The Jewish people don't even say "pig." They say, 'the other thing.' So 'other people, other side, other gods' with the 'other thing.' And from the story, you can tell that He was not among Jews if there were swine around Him.

And so as far as I know, as far as I'm concerned, it wasn't necessarily a distance as much as a completely different culture, and where they worship other gods as well. And they had other foreign customs, which was, again, something a religious Jew would not even consider doing.

RICK: So here's a young man who wants to experience, you know, he's brought up Jewish, he's brought up with these laws and everything, and he wanted to experience: "What's it like over there? They seem to be having a lot more fun than what I'm having. So I'm going to try this out." And so that's—to keep in mind, distant country, we're talking about going to the Gentiles.

AMIR: Absolutely.

RICK: And then what I love is when the father saw him, he was... the son as he was coming back, he was still a long way off. And the fact that the father saw him to me, it tells me that the father was looking for his son's return day after day after day. [AMIR: "Absolutely"] Praying, "Oh, God, bring my son back, bring him to his senses." And this day, as he was out there in his field, he looks and he sees, it looks like...

AMIR: ...He recognized him...

RICK: ...looks like my son, but he's different now. And so he runs to the son, and it says the father saw him and the father was filled with compassion. Not like we would think the father, "Yeah, now you're coming back. This is what you did when you left. This is how you made us feel." No, he didn't say anything like that. He saw him from a long way off and filled with compassion, he runs to his son, throws his arms around him and kisses him. And the son rehearsed what he was going to say to his father. He says what he rehearsed, but it wasn't what he said to his father because his father already had that love and that compassion. And sometimes when we pray to God or we are confessing to God, we feel that we have to get it exactly right as to getting God's

forgiveness. And God already has that compassion and that love and it's certainly, "I'm going to forgive you because you're My child."

AMIR: I know that in some places they come up with an ancient Jewish cultural habit or tradition that such a son would have been banished and put to shame and all of that. I personally never heard about that from Jewish people. I read about it more from Gentiles who tried to explain why the father had to run, why the father had to give him his robe and ring and all of that. But to be honest with you, you really don't need any cultural reason. In fact, to me, before I heard that, I already could see in the running towards his son, in the putting on the robe, in the putting on the ring, I am reminded of the words that, He who knew no sin became sin, so we might become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. And the Bible also says in the Old Testament, He clothed me with clothes of righteousness as well. So I can see how at any given point when you come back, when you repent, when you believe in the finished work of the Messiah, *that's* what makes you righteous. The righteousness is not of your own, it's not of your own deeds, it's not of your own fulfilling of commandments and all of that. It's the repentance, (a), and also the faith in the finished work, [b]. And that's when God is clothing you with the garment or coat of righteousness. And so, to me, I didn't need more customs or traditions or all of that. It's enough for me to see that already in Scriptures from the Old Testament and also the exchange once we come back to the Lord, He is clothing us with His righteousness because He took upon Himself our shame, our guilt, our filth and all of that. So what are the applications, Pastor Rick, when we deal with such a thing?

RICK: The thing that I would like our viewers to also mark down is the conversation with the older son. Because the older son, as he's talking to his father, says, "This son of yours," not my brother, he has nothing to do with his brother. So he says to his father, "This son of yours, this is

how he behaved." And the father says, "But your brother, your brother." The father brings that relationship right back to where it belongs.

And as you look at this parable, you go back again to who is the audience. And that older son is just like the Pharisees and the scribes. They are sitting there standing there muttering when Jesus is speaking. They want nothing to do... they feel like the son that God owes them because they are carrying out all these traditions. God owes them. And just like this son says, "I've been with you. I've never done anything wrong. I've never rejected you. And I've slaved for you." And that's how he saw himself as a slave in the household.

The same time we have these tax collectors and sinners that nobody wanted to have anything to do with, they were just like the prodigal. But they came to Jesus to hear what He had to say because they knew that they had a need. And they heard about the loving Father who, no matter what they did, was willing to receive them just as they are. It just reminds me of the song, "Just as I am, without one plea."

AMIR: Amazing.

RICK: And that's what God wants us to do, just to come to Him as we are. Whether we are believers, as believers, we come to Him when we've gone through a difficult time, or just come to Him when everything is going well and praise Him for the blessings He has given us. But if any of our viewers still are just wondering about who this God is, and would He really accept somebody like me, I want to say, just like the father, He sees you afar off, and He comes running to you and opens His arms. And He desires so much to receive you and to bless you just as you are.

AMIR: Yes, amen. And you know what? May we never, ever find ourselves in the position where we are angry for the love of God to the lost that are coming back. I mean, because if, God forbid, one day we will fall, we want to know that He will receive us with an open arm. And we want to

know that everybody around will be happy. And I think—Yeah, isn't that the case? Don't you want the people of faith to be happy when someone is coming back from some time of rebellion and all of that?

And honestly, when you know the words of the Bible and they reflect the character of God, how can you still, 2,000 years later, act as if anyone who walked away will not come back? I mean, or it's not allowed to come back? Some Christian cults are like that. And even some Christians are finding it hard to fathom that Israel will repent and come back one day. And God is going to, you know, all Israel will be saved. And these are people who were there and they rejected the Messiah. They thought that they can establish their own righteousness by their own deeds. And, you know, they'll find out. They are finding out and they will find out, especially throughout the tribulation. And the arms of the Lord, as we see in Romans 11 at the very end, are always open because the gifts and the callings of God are irrevocable. So it's beautiful.

RICK: Amen

AMIR: Well, Pastor Rick, once we can understand that whole thing, all the cultural and historical and geographical background, this parable really comes alive. And I hate to say it, but our time is up and I look forward to our next time together when we look at another parable. So thank you my friend. God bless you.

And for all of you back home, remember this content has also a presentation that you can find on our website on beholdisrael.org. There is a section for "Explore the Bible." And in that section, you can also ask Dr. Rick Yohn a question related to the topic we talked about and he will gladly answer. Thank you, Dr. Rick, for a great program. Thank you all for watching. Share it with as many as you can. God bless you and Shalom.

* Scripture is taken from the New King James Version unless noted otherwise.

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