





The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-32

Parables of Jesus

Today we will be talking about a parable. A parable is a story with another meaning, a story used to illustrate a lesson.

This is a fairly well known parable, a story that many people may have heard.

This story opens in the book of Luke, and the first thing we see is that all the tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus. What do we know about Jesus? Who does he always have around him? A lot of people! No one liked the tax collectors; they were usually dishonest people; and the sinners were looked down upon.

The Pharisees and scribes were complaining that Jesus was talking to the sinners and eating with them.

The tax collectors and sinners wanted to hear Jesus. Did he send them away? Did he tell them that he wasn't talking to them? No, that's not what Jesus said at all. But that's what the Pharisees thought that Jesus should have said. They were complaining and grumbling about Jesus and saying, Why is Jesus letting these people come hear him? Why is he eating with them?

Jesus responds to the Pharisees by telling three similar parables about lost things.

The first story he tells is about a man who lost one sheep. Have you heard this story? We are not going to go into detail about this story, but he told about the one lost sheep, and how the owner left all the sheep to go find the one that was lost.

The next story he tells is about a lady who has ten pieces of silver but she loses one. What does she do? She searches, she finds the one, then she has a big party.

Then Jesus tells a story about something else that is lost, and that is what this story is about.

There are three characters in this story; a certain man who had two sons.

The younger son came to his dad and said, I want you to give me the things that belong to me.

When do you get things that belong to people? It is usually after they've passed away. If you have two sons, and the father passes away, then usually at that time the property and things would be divided between the sons.

I want what belongs to me.

Does it belong to him yet? No. The Father is very much alive.

This story took place in Israel. If you do some research about the culture at the time, we know that what this younger son was asking was scandalous. It was an outrageous request and very insulting to the father. This was basically like saying to his father, 'I wish you were dead, just give me my stuff.'

This is not the same as just asking for something early.

This was a huge insult to the father.

This was basically like slapping his father in the face. It was basically like telling your father to "drop dead." This would have given the son a very bad reputation if people heard what he had done to his father.

This was simply not done. But, he asked the dad for his portion of the inheritance.

Did the dad say, 'NO!' and slap his son?



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No, the father gave the son exactly what he asked.

This was unusual, and most men at this time would not do that. If a son asked for this, most fathers would say, no, I'm not dead. This is rude, you have insulted me and shamed me, and this is wrong. But this man gave his son exactly what he asked for.

This father did not have to give it to him, but it seems like the father did it willingly. Also, there seems like it was the possibility that the other son may have received his inheritance at the same time.

After his dad gave him the portion of his estate, the younger son gathered all of his things and went to a far away country.

Do you think he invested his money, made a lot more money, was very wise, and did well?

No, he did not. He spent all his money on really stupid things. He wasted all his money with crazy living. Maybe he gambled, maybe he drank a lot, maybe he had a lot of parties. Either way, this man was not wise and he wasted all of his money. But really, whose money was it? It was really his father's because his father was still alive.

He spent every last bit of the money.

Not only is he broke, but a famine came to the land. What does this mean?

Discuss:

What is a famine? This is a time when it does not rain, and there is not enough food. The crops die, then the animals cannot eat, and many of the animals die because they don't have enough food or water. Any food that is available is very expensive because there is not enough and everyone is hungry.

Does the son have any money to buy food?

The son is a foreigner. He is a Jew, and he has gone to a far country, probably a Gentile country,, and he needs a job. In verse 15 it tells us that he "joined himself" to a person who lived in this country. This is an interesting word; if you read it in the original Greek it means "to glue, or fasten."

It seems like he found someone, maybe someone he knew, went to their house and they couldn't get him to leave. Have you ever had someone visit, and you wanted them to go home, but they just would not leave? It sounds like that is what the younger son did; stayed and was no longer welcome. He wouldn't go away, so maybe they gave him the worst job they could find. They might have even thought, he won't want to do this job so he will leave.

This person sent him out in the fields to feed the pigs.

It says "sent him", so we might be able to guess that he was feeding the pigs in exchange for a place to stay.

This is probably the worst job you could get. If you took this job, it was because you had no other options. You would never pick this job over any other job. It was gross, it was smelly, but that is not all.

Discuss:

Do you know how the Jews felt about pigs? Pigs were unclean. Jews did not eat them, and they did not keep pigs. We can probably guess that this was a Gentile country. To the Jews, a pig was the lowest, most vile animal. It did not get any worse than a pig. Pigs roll in the mud, and in their food, they are filthy.



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What do pigs eat? What do people give pigs to eat?

Pig food is leftovers and scraps, but not good leftovers like a bone of meat. Pigs eat the gross leftovers on the plate that no one wants to save. Pigs are fed the leftovers that you put in the trash. Pigs also eat corn husks and corncobs, things that people do not want to eat.

This man was hungry.

Have you ever been really hungry? This man was so hungry that he wanted to eat the corn husks that the pigs were eating. You might think that the people he was with would offer him the scraps first. Maybe they would let him pick through the scraps before they gave them to the pigs and give him the best parts. But no one gave him even the pig's food.

Then the man "came to himself" (Luke 15:17).

Discuss:

What does it mean to "come to yourself?" It means to come to your senses.

Have you ever thought, "What was I thinking?"

Or, "that was dumb, I shouldn't have done that."

So the younger son thought, "My dad has hired servants. He feeds his servants and they have plenty of bread and they have food left over, and I'm out here starving."

Discuss:

Think about this. What does this little bit of information tell you about his father?

His father probably has money; he has hired servants. We also know that this son took much of the money, but his father still has plenty of money to live on and manage his estate.

His dad sounds like a generous person. It says that his father's servants have plenty of bread. Does his father give his servants just enough? No, he makes sure that they have plenty, and they have extra left over. His dad sounds like a better employer than the man with the pigs that the son is working for.

The son comes up with a plan.

He says, I'm going to go to my dad. I'm going to tell him I've sinned against heaven and against him, and I am no longer worthy to be called his son.

I'll ask him to make me like one of his hired servants.

We do not know for sure if the man is truly sorry. Has he really recognized that he has done wrong? Does he realize this was all his fault? Or is he just looking for a way to live a little bit better life? The reader doesn't really know.

The son makes the journey back home. It might have taken him a while; we know he was in a far country, When he gets closer to his father's house, but he's still very far away, his father sees him coming.

Is it hard to recognize people when they are far away?



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Discuss:

How did his dad see him if he was so far away? Do you think his dad was looking for him? Was he waiting for him? Was his dad hoping that he would come home? If you see someone that you know very well coming from far away, would you recognize them because you know them?

Do you think the father has been concerned about his son? Did they have phones back then? (No) Did they have a mail system like they have now? (No) Would he have known if his son was safe? Would he have known if his son was alive? Do you think maybe he was wondering if his son survived in the famine?

Do you think the father was looking every day for the son, thinking maybe today is the day that the son will come home?

The father saw the son when he was very far away, and what did the father do?

He RAN. The father is running towards the son. Is he excited to see him?

Discuss:

Did the father know the reason that the son was coming home?

Did he know that the son was coming to tell his father that he was sorry?

The son could have been coming to ask the father for more money.

Does the father know WHY the son is coming back?

Does the father care why the son is coming back?

Does the father say, I want to make sure that you are sorry or first, then I will hug you?

Did he try to find these things out before he started running? Not at all.

What about us? Do we sometimes want people to apologize before we forgive them? Isn't that our attitude sometimes? Do we want someone to say they're sorry before we restore the relationship?

Did this father care if the son said he was sorry? The father has no idea why the son is coming back, no idea what he is going to say, but yet he runs to meet him.

Not only does he run, he falls on the son. He hugs him, throws his arms around his neck, and kisses him.

He had no idea if the son is sorry, or why he's here, but he doesn't care.

The son starts in on the speech he prepared. He says, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. What does that mean?

What was the father's response?

What did he say? Did the father give an answer to what the son said? No. He did not answer; He did not say whether he agreed or disagreed; he simply did not respond at all to what the son said. This does not seem to matter to the father. He just seems so happy to have his son back.

Instead the father begins speaking to the servants.



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He tells the servants to go get the best robe, and put it on the son. He tells them to get a ring and put it on his hand and put shoes on his feet.

Do you think this man stank? It might have been a while since he had a bath or a shower? Did he have nice clothes? Did he smell like stinky pigs? There's been a famine; there's a good chance he did not have water to take a shower. He was probably really dirty. But the father did not care.

Bring the best robe, and put it on him.

The robe symbolized honor and status. This made the son part of the family again, and took away the shame that he had from what he had done. Doing this in front of the servants made it clear to everyone that his past was forgotten and his original place in the family is now completely restored.

Put the ring on him.

What does the ring symbolize? He's mine. It symbolizes that he belongs. He's part of the family.

If you wear a wedding ring, it means you belong to someone. This younger son belongs. This ring most likely would have had a seal on it, and the father was giving the son the authority to conduct business for the family by giving him this ring.

Put shoes on his feet.

Servants usually went barefoot. It is likely that this man was barefoot because he had been a servant, he was feeding pigs. Shoes symbolized that he was a member of the family and NOT a servant as he had come home prepared to be.

Then the father said, Bring the fattened calf.

Where did this man get a fat cow? Everyone else has starving animals because of the famine, but he has a fat cow. Apparently he did not run out of food during the famine; he planned ahead. His cows had plenty to eat, and he had them fattened and ready to eat.

Let's have a party! My son was dead, and he is alive again. He was lost and now he is found.

How many people will a fattened calf feed? You can feed a lot of people with a calf.

The father told them to get ready and have a party.

Normally this son would not have been accepted back. He would have been shamed, everyone would have known what he had done. But the father wanted everyone to know that the son returned, and he is now accepted back into the family.

It could have made the father look bad because he took the son back after the son had shamed him. But did the father hesitate to let the son come back? No. The father welcomed him back with a huge feast and a big party.

Maybe the father has been anticipating the moment his son would return, and he already had planned for a party if and when the son returned. It did not take them very long to throw together a big party. It must have been quite a party; there was music and dancing, and you could hear the music all the way out in the field.

Who is in the field?



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The other son is out in the field. He has been out there working, and when he gets close to the house he hears all the music. So he calls one of the servants, and says, What's going on? What do I hear? And the servant says, Your brother came back, and your father killed the fatted calf because your brother is here safe, and we are having a party for your brother.

Did the older brother say, oh good! I'm so glad my brother is back safely! Did he run to the party to see his brother?

No. He's jealous, and he is angry.

He's so upset that he refused to go to the party.

The father came out to talk to the brother. He said, come join us! We have food, we have music, we are dancing, come join the party!

The brother said, I've been working for you for years, and I've always done what you asked. You never even gave me a goat to have a party with my friends. He's saying this isn't fair.

Then he puts it back on the father. He says, as soon as "your son" came home, the son who wasted all YOUR money on bad things, you killed the fatted calf and celebrated. The older brother seemed to know what his younger brother spent money on but we don't know if he's guessing, or if there were rumors about what the younger son had done.

Then the father said to the older brother, you are always with me.

Everything I have is yours. You can have it all. You are here all the time. It was good that we should have a party and rejoice. Then the father makes it personal for the older brother. He says, "your brother" was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and now he is found.

The story ends, and the reader does not know if the older brother changed his mind and went to the party or not.

Jesus in the Story



The sinners and tax collectors represent the younger son, and the Pharisees represent the older brother.

They are the ones who obeyed all the commandments, but they never understood the heart of the father. The story is left open-ended as the Pharisees are left with the decision of whether or not they will join in the forgiveness of the father. Will they decide to come into the “party,” which represents the kingdom of heaven.

The father had no regrets; he gave everything for his son. He could have asked the son to pay him back, but he did not.

Who does this father represent? He represents God. He represents our Father, who always loves us, who comes looking for us, and is waiting for us to come to him.

His love is not conditional. He does not put conditions on his forgiveness; he has already forgiven us. He is waiting for us to accept his forgiveness. He wants us to come to him, open our hearts, and accept what he’s already given.

Jesus died for our sins so that we can have his robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

The robe that the father put on the son is the robe of righteousness that we get from Jesus when we believe on him.

Jesus was perfect; he never sinned. We sin, but when we believe on Jesus, we receive this robe of righteousness which makes us pure in God’s sight. God gives us this robe when we come to him and come into the kingdom. Just like the father in the story covered the sins of his lost son with the glory of his own robe,, it is the same for us when we put our faith in Jesus.

Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

37. The Lost Coin

1. What did this lady do when she lost her coin?
2. What did she do when she found it?
3. Who did she tell?
4. What do the angels of God do when someone repents?

Zephaniah 3:17

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, He will calm all your fears.

38. The Lost Son

Read Romans 8:35-39

1. What can separate us from God's love?
2. We cannot be separated from God's love by death or?
3. We cannot be separated by angels, heavenly rulers, or?
4. We cannot be separated now or?

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

39. What Fills Your Heart?

1. Where do our words come from?
2. What comes out of the heart of a good man?
3. What comes out of the heart of an evil man?
4. What will we give account for to God?

Luke 6:45

A good man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth good; an evil man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

40. Workers in the Vineyard

Read Ephesians 2:8-9

1. What have we been saved by?
2. What have we been saved through?
3. Were we saved by anything we did?
4. What was our salvation from God?
5. If it were by our works then we could do what?

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit....



