

The Parables of Jesus

- The Parable of the Lost (Prodigal) Son, His Father and His Older Brother

(Luke 15:11-32)

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus and His disciples along with the religious leaders and the “publicans and other sinners” were in or around Capernaum in Galilee. Jesus was preparing to take His final journey to Jerusalem where He would be arrested and crucified. This parable is the third in a “trilogy” of parables

in this time of teaching concerning Jesus’ mission to the Jewish people and restoring them back into relationship with the Father. The first parable was the “Parable of the Lost Sheep” and the second was “The Parable of the Lost Coin.”

Even though these parables are about the lost sinners of Israel, Jesus was actually directing these parables to both the religious leaders and His disciples. It was directed to the religious leaders because of their failure to do what they were entrusted to do as God’s “ambassadors” to the people. They were not caring and tending to God’s people as they should. They became self-righteous and looked down upon the publicans and other sinners. They failed to realize that they were in the same boat with the publicans and sinners – they just didn’t realize it because of their self-righteousness.

Jesus was also speaking to His disciples. They would soon to be the ones entrusted by Jesus and the Father to tend to their “flock” and bring back into the fold those who were “lost.” Jesus wanted to make sure that His disciples would never lose sight of the importance of being entrusted to that call. Jesus, through showing the failure of the religious leaders, was teaching and warning His disciples to not get caught up in the same incorrect attitude of heart of self-righteousness, covetousness, greed and corruption that the religious leaders had concerning those who had strayed from the Father.

Luke’s Gospel makes this very clear as we read the first two verses in chapter 15. In Luke 15:1, we read that after Jesus’ teaching about what “the cost” of being a true disciple of His really meant and how it would affect the lives of anyone choosing to truly follow Him, we see that strangely enough it was the publicans and sinners who were drawing nearer to Him. (*“...Then drew near to him all the publicans and sinners to hear him.”*) In Luke 15:2, we see the Pharisees and scribes who were present were “offended” by this and began to murmur among themselves. (*“And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”*)

Instead of being happy that the “publicans and sinners” were possibly being drawn back to the faith, they were “offended.” Their jealousy of Jesus and their own self-righteousness blinded their eyes to what the heart of God truly was and blinded them in seeing how much the Father loved His people which by the way, believe it or not, included the religious leaders. Jesus was trying to expose their incorrect attitude of heart and at the same time trying to teaching them, as well as His disciples, what the correct attitude of heart should be towards these “publicans and sinners.” It was to be the same heart that He and the Father have.

In Luke’s Gospel, as we had previously mentioned. This parable was the third of three parables concerning the Father’s heart and Jesus’ heart towards those who would be lost forever if not sought after. Jesus chose to spend time on this topic. He gave three parables on it. By doing so we can truly get the importance that Jesus had placed on this particular aspect of what the correct attitude of heart should be by those who He entrusts His people to. This “attitude of heart” towards the lost would also be soon extended to all people – Jew and Gentile, male and female.

“The Parable of the Lost (Prodigal) Son, His Father and His Older Brother” - Luke 15:11-32 - *“And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance*

with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

You may have noticed that I entitled this parable a little different than its usual title. I believe, as we will see, that Jesus was not only emphasizing the one who went astray but I believe He really was emphasizing the "attitude of heart" of the father but more importantly, the incorrect attitude of heart of the older brother. Therefore, let's first briefly review the "characters" in this parable and who they represent.

- The father - Obviously this represents God, the Father.
- The "lost son" - Over the years we have come to know this son as the "prodigal son." The term "prodigal" defined - It means to carelessly and foolishly spend money, time, etc. It is characterized by lavish, reckless and wasteful expenditures (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This "lost son" in this parable represented, in the context of the setting in Luke 15, the "publicans and sinners" who were following Jesus in which the Pharisees had a problem with. They were the ones who Jesus was speaking about concerning those who were "lost" in a foolish and reckless lifestyle and strayed away from God.
- The "eldest son" - He was representative of the Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders of the day. In context of the parable and who Jesus was actually speaking to, the Pharisees and other religious leaders, we can actually say that this parable was really intended for them. This would actually make this "character," the elder son, the main character of this parable. It was through this "elder son" that Jesus really wanted to emphasize and reveal the incorrect attitude of heart and self-righteousness of the religious leaders. Remember, it was the religious leaders who were indignant towards the "publicans and sinners" who Jesus allowed in His midst.
- The "inheritance" – This was also another important "character" within our parable. This was everything that the father of the household owned to be given freely to his sons. This was representative of everything of the Kingdom of God in which Father God desires to rightfully give to all His children.

This parable can be divided into two sections. The first part concerns the "lost" younger son. This is the most well known part of this parable. Let's briefly review this first part. The use of this "younger son" as being the one who wanted the inheritance now and then squandered it was reflective of someone who would be immature and act hastily and foolishly, hence the use of a "younger" son.

The younger son asks for his share of the inheritance and leaves home. He then proceeds to squander it all on riotous and reckless living. After doing this, this younger son seems to "come to his senses." He begins to realize what he truly had back home with his father. He begins to realize how much his father truly had given him and that being a part of his father's "household" was actually a blessing and privilege. We see, however, that he was hesitant and was very concerned about how he would be received by his father. Unfortunately, he didn't yet truly comprehend the tremendous love that his father had for him.

He acknowledges his foolishness and decides to go home and ask his father if he could just stay in the servants' quarters because of what he had done. He comes to the false conclusion that his father would disown him as a son but that maybe he would allow him to come back as a servant or one of the hirelings. We do see him "rehearse" a speech that he would say to his father. What he began to think was truly from a heart that realized what he had done. From within his heart he was going to tell his father, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee..."*

Notice, what the younger son was thinking. He recognized that he had "sinned" against not only his father but against "heaven" – he sinned against God. In other words this younger son truly had a heart of repentance. He also truly recognized his need for his father and to come back into the household, even if it was as a servant. He was humbled. The arrogance and foolishness was gone. All of that immaturity had left and he "grew up" and recognized his need to be home.

As we know the father was always looking for his son to return. And when he saw the son from afar he ran and embraced him and welcomed him home. We must also, noticed that even though the father was looking for the son to return and embraced and welcomed him home, he still allowed the son to speak what was in his heart. The younger son repeated what was in his heart as he said, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee..."* He allowed his son to speak forth the words of repentance. As we know, the father welcomed him back with open arms and held a great feast because his son was back home and declared, *"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."*

Obviously, this is a wonderful story of God the Father's desire for the "lost sons (and daughters)," such as the "publicans and sinners" (which really includes everyone) of this world, to be brought back into a restored relationship with Him. We see the heart of the father towards his "lost son" in this parable. God, the Father is always looking for and waiting for the lost sinners of this world to "come to their senses," repent and recognize their need for their God and return back "home" where they belong - back home with their Father God. This is reflective of the Father's heart towards the sinners of this world both Jew and Gentile. He forever desires for them to return back into His "household of faith."

When they do, our loving Heavenly Father rejoices, as well as all heaven and the angels rejoice along with Him. The father in this parable restores the "lost son" back into total relationship, as if nothing had happened. We see this by the following actions that the father does for the "lost son." These actions are reflective of what Father, God does with the "lost souls" that return to Him. He chooses to remember their sin no more.

The father in the parable placed a "robe" upon his son. This is always representative of bringing someone back into "right standing" and a restored relationship. It symbolically declares that, "You are welcome in my home." It also suggests a form of bringing comfort to a weary traveler by keeping them warm. For the "lost soul," the "sinner" that has come with a heart of true repentance to Father God, it represents the "robe of

righteousness," the "robe of right standing," signifying that you are welcome and relationship has been restored. The "lost son," the sinner, is no longer looked upon as being separated because of their sinful ways but rather, they are again looked upon as a "son of the Most High God."

The father places a "ring" upon the son's hand. A ring was one that would have a "signet" on it. This signet would be the family seal. In any legal transaction, a person would use that signet as their "signature." They would melt some wax on the document and then press their signet with the seal of the family to confirm the transaction. This signet meant that you had all the legal authority of the father and family "backing you up." For the "lost soul," the sinner who has returned to their Father God, all authority of God's Kingdom is now given back to the returning "son." Their spiritual authority over all things that was once lost to the devil because of sin, has now been restored back to them.

The father placed "shoes" upon His feet. This is symbolic of the restoration from a breach in the relationship. In Jewish custom, when there was a divorce or a breach in a covenant relationship, they would remove the shoes from the one who breached the relationship. Each party would keep a shoe as a remembrance of the breached relationship. By the father placing "shoes" upon his son's feet he was symbolically stating that the breach in their relationship has been restored - just as if that breach had never happened. Spiritually speaking, this is symbolically stating that the breach in the relationship between God the Father and His son who was lost in sin, has now been restored and they are back in **covenant relationship** with each other.

The "lost son," the "prodigal" son came to his senses and ran home into the arms of his father. There was a **true repentance** - he turned away from the path he was on (true repentance) and turned into the arms of the "lover of his soul." The father rejoiced. The true repentant heart of the unsaved and sinner is always accepted back into the family of God.

The second part of this parable most of the time gets lost because of the tremendous meaning of the first part. However, it speaks to the real audience that Jesus was speaking to – the religious leaders who were present, as well as His disciples. The second part of this parable concerns the "elder" son. The use of the term, "elder son" is also reflective of the fact that being the elder of the two, he should be and act in a mature manor. However, as we know, it was not the case.

We must remember the context of which this parable was given. Jesus was on a roadside with a multitude of people that consisted of His disciples, "publicans and sinners," as well as Pharisees and scribes. In the previous parables of the "Lost Sheep" and the "Lost Coin," Jesus was directing those parables to the Pharisees and scribes. This parable was directed to them as well. In the first part concerning the "lost son," Jesus is mostly "setting the stage" for the real purpose of this parable - showing the incorrect attitude of heart of the Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders.

Let's briefly review this part of the parable. The elder son was "out in the field." This does not necessarily mean that he was working in the field. He was given his share of the inheritance. It was the same amount as the younger son for the father "divided" the inheritance (Luke 15:13). This would mean that he did not need to work. He just stayed home and enjoyed what was given him.

We see that both sons received and took their share of the inheritance. The younger son left the house and went and lost it all on a riotous, sinful lifestyle. However, the elder son took his inheritance but remained in his father's house and lazily did nothing else with the inheritance.

When the older son, was coming in from the field (not that he was necessarily working) he heard the music and the merriment that was coming from the house. He inquired of one of the servants and was told about the return home of his younger brother and the feast that his father was having in honor of this younger

son returning home. This elder son became indignant and would not go in and partake of the festivities. In other words he threw a "hissy fit."

The father came to the elder son and "entreated" (begged) him to come in. The elder brother made himself quite clear to his father what his thoughts were concerning the younger son. He also made it clear concerning his bitterness and resentment towards his father. He expected his father to reward him for, what he thought was his faithfulness to him. Obviously, his so-called "faithfulness" came with an "agenda." His attitude of heart towards his father was totally misguided. This was just as much of the problem as his incorrect heart towards his brother.

The father tells this elder son that his thoughts about this whole situation were misplaced. The attitude of the elder brother's heart of bitterness and resentment towards his brother was not right. He should instead be rejoicing, along with his father, that his brother had turned from that riotous lifestyle and had come home with a repentant heart. The attitude of the elder son's heart of bitterness and resentment towards his father was just as much incorrect.

The elder son's heart became hardened. He did not understand what his father's heart was all about. His father was not being a "respector of persons." It was not that the father loved one more than the other. On the contrary, he loved them both, equally – very much.

This was truly the crux of the parable. Jesus was trying to break the self-righteous attitude of the religious leaders towards the "publicans and sinners" – the lost. He was also revealing their incorrect attitude of heart towards God, the Father. They were actually becoming bitter of what the Father was doing through Jesus, as the lost were starting to grasp their need to return "home."

Just as the elder son became indignant, so did the religious leaders. Just as the father tried to reason with the eldest son, so was the Father, through Jesus, trying to reason with the religious leaders and express to them that they should rejoice that the "lost" are coming home. Oh!! And by the way – they were just as lost!!!

So what was Jesus expressing through this parable to the Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders. What was he expressing to His disciples who were soon to become leaders within His Church? What is He expressing to us today, who are in the Body of Christ and whom some may be in leadership positions?

In the first part of the parable, He was revealing the heart of God the Father towards the "lost souls" who had gone astray and had been "lost" in their sinful ways and lifestyle. These were the very ones that the Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders persecuted Jesus for because of His actions of always being with those who they considered to be "sinners."

Jesus was acting on behalf of His Father's heart and His desire for these "lost ones" to turn from their sinful ways, repent and come back to their loving, merciful Heavenly Father who is always waiting for them with open arms. When they do return, He restores what they had lost. He restores the relationship between those ones who were once lost in sin, back to full "sonship" with their loving Father, God. He restores and renews their legal, spiritual authority and position over all that is within the Father's Kingdom.

In the second part of this parable, He was revealing the incorrect attitude of heart that the Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders had formulated concerning these "publicans and sinners," as well their incorrect attitude of heart towards God, the Father. Over the years, these leaders became the very thing they started out hating. They became judgmental, prejudicial, discriminatory and self-righteous - not just towards the people but also towards God. They lost the true understanding of who their God really is. They

lost the true "call" that they were entrusted with by God to continually point His people to Him by expressing and showing His love and mercy for them all.

We also see two interesting actions that many times go without notice in the parable.

#1 - We see the father was waiting and looking for the "lost son" to return - Luke 15:20.

#2 - We also, see the father's love for the elder son because it was the father that went out to this elder son. It was the father who made the effort to go to this elder son and bring him into a renewed and restored relationship with the father and his brother. (Luke 15:28)

In this parable, we can say that there were really two sons who were "lost" in this parable. One who was lost in a lifestyle of sin and riotous living; the other who was "lost" because of a heart filled with self-righteousness, bitterness, lack of mercy and had resentment towards men and towards God.

Jesus was always reaching out to the "publicans and sinners." Jesus was also reaching out and showing the Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders that their Father God was not giving up on them either. They needed to repent from their incorrect attitude of heart and turn from the way they judged and looked at others who they viewed as being "cursed by God."

The point was that ***all of them***, the publicans and sinners, as well as the Pharisees, scribes and all the "self-righteous" ones needed to ***repent***. In this parable we see and know that the one "lost son" returned and was restored. We are left not knowing what the "elder son" would do. That was to be left up to the Pharisees and scribes to decide what they would do. Would they "have ears to hear" what Jesus was teaching them?

It is a "true repentant heart" which causes "Heaven to rejoice." It does not matter who or where you are. You can be "with the pigs" or "out in the field." Each of us needs to repent and return to God. He is always there waiting for us to "come home" so that we can be restored back into relationship with Him as our Heavenly Father. We must understand and recognize the tremendous value that our Heavenly Father places upon His most cherished of all His creation. The value He places on all of us is the blood of His only begotten Son – Jesus. It was, is and always will be the same for anyone who truly repents and turns from his or her wicked, sinful ways into the waiting arms of their loving Heavenly Father. "

"Let those that have ears to hear, let them hear."