

Luke 16:1-13

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- [0:00] Good morning HTC family. It's good to be back in the house of God with God's people. My family. Praise God for that. Thanks for your prayers for us. We had a marvelous time.
- I'm sure we'll be sharing with you words and pictures of our journey. Three stories are featured in our text this morning.
- Stories about things that first of all were lost. Then they're found. And then joy abounds. Overflows when those lost things are recovered. Third, who among us has not experienced the joy of finding something that was lost?
- Perhaps even this week you have lost your keys. Ever lose any keys? Sure you have. You search high and low and you retrace your steps hoping to find them.
- [1:12] Minutes turn into hours. Hours into days. And joy into frustration. But then you find them. And you rejoice until you lose them again. Lost cash. Ever lose any cash? Was with our brother Keith this week and he was mourning the loss of a \$10 bill.
- Initially his search yielded absolutely nothing. Day or two later I get another call. The \$10 had returned and the joy likewise had returned.
- We know about losing lost things. And then he lost keys and cash but lost kids. Anybody ever lose any kids?
- Amusement parks, department stores. If you've got a little child that, well we've got him here. Well I had a little lostness of my own when I was in Africa.
- [2:26] I was out running in a vineyard in South Africa. And I thought I had set my, you know, your marks, your landmarks.
- And then everything started looking the same, you know. A lot of vineyards. And you know how it is when you get lost. You don't like to admit that you're lost. I mean there are other people out there and you don't want to say anything.
- This is particularly a man thing. But then I humbled myself. Isaac and Martin were out there walking their Rhodesian Ridgeback dogs.
- A couple of black African brothers. And I said, I'm lost. Can you help me? Can you help a brother out? So they, I couldn't exactly tell them. You know, I was giving them something and it wasn't computing with them.
- So finally they put the Rhodesian road backs in the back and the African American brother in the front. And we went on the search and finally 23 Constance, Klein, Constantia.
- [3:30] I recognized the place. I was so joyful that I went back in, gave them a little something, something. They were joyful and I was too. I got home.
- They got a little tip and everything was well. Lost things. Things found. And the joy that results from that.
- Luke 15, we have three stories of essentially the same thing. Lost, found, and then celebration.

That goes along with being found. Ah, I believe this answers the question that may have emerged in Luke chapter 14.

Yeah? If you'd notice there, it talks about a lot of invitations that are being sent out. And what we have here could well answer the question.

[4:28] Hey, who's coming to the banquet? Who's coming to the feast? And here we have them coming into view. Huh? The lost and found stories of Luke 15 find a broader context in Luke 14.

Jesus had received an invitation, chapter 14, verse 1, to dine. Huh? At the house of the ruler of the Pharisees.

There he healed a man on the Sabbath day. He challenged the pride of the invited guests, 7 through 11, and exhorted the attendees to be kind-hearted and invite those who were unable to reciprocate the kindness.

Those who socially were on the margins in verses 12 through 14. Guess what would be the situation? Doing that would mimic the gracious nature of the kingdom of God.

So in verses 15 through 24, he told a story, here it is, about invited guests. Most of them who made excuses as to why they could not attend the great banquet.

[5:52] So an invitation had gone out to all kinds of people everywhere. To come in so that the master's house would be filled.

But the insiders, here we have it again, were going to be excluded and the outsiders were going to be included. The nature of God's kingdom.

And furthermore, and notice as we begin, the 15, the words that begin, chapter 15, are on the heels of the discipleship challenge that we see in chapter 14, verses 25 through 33.

And listen to how chapter 14 closes. You see it there in verse 35? It is of no use, either for the soil, for the manure pile.

It is thrown away. And here it is. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. 15.1. Now those tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

[7:07] They had ears to hear. Do you this morning? Have ears to hear?

Well, you say, well, Pastor Jay, I've been around the church a long time. You know, I was actually at Holy Trinity when you got here. I've been walking with God many years.

Are you hearing him? Are you listening to him? The badge of religious honor does not necessarily mean that you are listening to him.

Ah, let he that has ears to hear, hear the voice of God. Huh? Here it was, those who were on the moral fringes, the tax collectors and sinners.

And guess what? They're drawing near to him. The ministry of Jesus was filling the very void in their souls. Heaven's banquet through the ministry of Jesus was being spread.

[8:20] And they were at the table. Huh? His invitation, listen to this, Jesus' invitation was extended both to the religious of that day as well as to the irreligious like the publicans and the sinners of that day.

Jesus kept company with both groups and wanted a harvest from each. Huh? Huh? Heaven's banquet through Jesus and the gospel and his ministry.

So while the Pharisees were like salt who had lost its taste, chapter 14, verse 34, there were on those in Jesus' audience who felt their need of him and were listening to his voice.

While those on the moral fringes gravitated toward him, the self-righteous grumbled about him. You see that there in verse 2?

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. They found fault with him.

[9:31] Not new. We've seen it before, haven't we? They criticized Jesus because he welcomed the very people who needed help. But he challenged them, didn't he?

Huh? And that's what this story is about. He challenged the grumbling of the religious leaders with stories about gladness that accompanies the recovery of lost things.

That's the basis for these three stories that we have here. Gladness and joy. Oh, we've tasted of that joy here this morning.

Huh? Oh, you've turned my mourning into dancing again. Oh, you've lifted my sorrows. When lost things are found, rejoicing is in order.

Do not the stories in today's text clearly bring that out? A lost sheep is cherished so much that a shepherd would leave 99 in an open field under the care of others to go and find one lost sheep.

[10:36] And upon finding it, he rejoiced with others and invited others in on the celebration, in on the joy that was his. Similarly, a woman with 10 treasured silver coins, each worth a day's pay of a common worker in that day, losing one of them.

Everything else stopped. There was diligent search made until the lost coin was recovered. Then with the recovery of the coin, there was joy.

What was Jesus' point? Just as when treasured things that are lost on earth, there is a celebration and gladness. Similarly, there is joy in heaven when lost souls are recovered.

When they're rescued on earth and the ministry of Jesus on earth was contributing to the joy of heaven.

Gladness and grumbling. Gladness, not grumbling, is the order of the day. When lost souls find their way to the feast of grace.

[11:45] Did you hear that this morning? Have you found your way to the feast of grace? If you haven't, it's yours in Jesus.

It's yours in and through his person and his work and what a feast it is. So the third point of Jesus' teaching was the clincher, wasn't it? When a shepherd finds a lost sheep, there's joy.

When a woman finds a lost coin, there's joy. And when a man, when a son, when a son who has lost his way finds his way back home, there's the joyous celebration that's led by the daddy.

He leads it. Because my boys come home. My son that lost his way is back under my roof again.

And that's a cause of joy. When a son comes home. Oh, what a marvelous picture of God's grace through the gospel.

[12:54] Is there any question why this particular story has been called one of the world's supreme masterpieces of storytelling?

One of the reasons why it is so categorized or classified because it radiates. It radiates with the brilliance of the grace of God. His amazing grace, God's compassionate heart, his open arms are unmistakable.

One has to be blind to miss what Jesus is saying here. While the story that is before us has had the label over the years, the prodigal son that highlights the...

Really, what comes into focus is the role of the father. And a title that befits him and some have been given is certainly more appropriate.

What you have here, the kindness of God that is multidimensional. It's actually two-pronged because according to chapter 15, verse 11, look at it with me.

[14:05] He said there was a man who had two sons. A man who had two sons. The story of the younger one comes into focus.

Chapter 15, verses 11 through 19, we have the saga of the younger son. And from what we see in the text, this is one of the young and restless of that day.

Call of the world had been beckoning him from the safety and the security of the family home. You ever hear that kind of call? Ah, that kind of call is in the city, in the various corridors, in the places of the city.

Sometimes you can hear it even in a university context. It beckons and calls you. And did you know what? You don't have to go to a far country, geographically, to hear the call of the far country.

I mean, there can be a contrast in the homes, your home and the home that is right next to you. The home that is right next to you can really be a far country, if you will, far away from the family moorings and morals in the gospel that's there.

[15:21] It pulled on him enough for him to ask for the share of the family inheritance. And early in the story, friends, the father comes into the picture, doesn't he, in verse 12.

The younger said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that's coming to me. And he divided his property between them, that is, his two sons.

He allowed the son to take his portion. Goes off to a far country, a world away from his home.

What a deal. Far from the code of conduct of the father's home. Oh, friends, beware of the pull of the far country. It can pull you.

Oh, it can pull you. It can beckon you. It can call you. It can call you in the midnight hour. It can call you in the marketplace. It can call you in an office setting.

[16:21] It can call you. Huh? Beware of it. Some of you here this morning, you need to put your hands in your ears. You need to put your hand over your heart. You need to guard your heart.

Proverbs tells us to do that. Guard your heart with all diligence for out of the heart, proceed the very issues of life. Guard yourself. From the pull of the far country, and eventually we're told that not too long, the son, he hit rock bottom, didn't he?

He lived foolishly. The text helps us to see that. You see the words in the text. He squandered his property. He lived recklessly. He spent everything.

Huh? It got so bad that he disgraced himself by taking a job feeding the animals that were considered unclean by the standards of his own people. He's famished so much that pig food looked good to him.

The picture that we see here of him, it's one of a lost nest. He's out there, and friends, he's in over his head. Perhaps he had thought again, what have I gotten myself into?

[17:34] Ever think like that? When you think about where you were and where you are now, where your feet were then and where they are now, thought it would be good for you and good to you.

You want to make a phone call. How many times have you wanted to go back home? You wait a little longer, and then you come to yourself.

Such was the case with the younger man. Notice what was going on in his mind, verses 17 through 19. But when he came to himself, he said, how many of my, here it is, my father's hired servants have more than enough food, but I perish with hunger.

I'll rise and go to my father. I will say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

His servants are full, but he was empty. He's plagued with hunger. We get in touch with his thoughts.

[18:49] He's blown it. He knows it. Confession and acknowledgement is in the order of the day. And whoa, what we have here, though the son is in a far country.

Oh, listen to this. He could not escape the shadow of his father's love that cast a long shadow and reached him way there in the far country.

He knows what he's done and he doesn't dress it up. His sin has been against heaven, against God and his father. And he would acknowledge such and was willing even to reenter as a servant.

There's a cameo of the younger son. But it gives way quickly to the shift from the saga of the younger son to the superlative grace of a loving father.

Oh, wow. This picture is absolutely stunning. Here's the hero. Before the son sees his father, the father sees him.

[19:58] In verse 20, he arose, came to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion. And he ran.

He ran. So, he felt something within and his feet got to going. He embraced him and kissed him.

While the son, he's a fraction of the son who left. Still, he recognizes, hey, that's my boy. Compassion wells up in his heart.

He finds himself trotting in the direction of his son. Compassion is that internal motivation that demands an external kind of response. It gripped him and fueled him.

And though it was rather undignified for an elderly Jewish man to run, he takes up the skirts of his garment and he makes his way to his son. And he finds him.

[20:59] His son who had previously scripted out his talk, so to speak. He gives it. Huh? And the welcome of the younger son continues in verse 22.

Clear expressions of acceptance. Huh? Ah, you see it there? Father said to his service, bring quickly the best robe. Put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.

For this my son was dead and alive again was lost and is found and he began to celebrate. The best robe, that was the father's robe. The ring was the family signet ring that would reinstate him into sonship.

Shoes, slaves, didn't wear any shoes but the son was going to get shoes on that day. Ah, the fatted calf. This is the one that they had been getting ready. They had been feeding it with wheat.

It was reserved for special occasions. And this, this, this was a big cow. Huh? It was big enough to feed the whole village.

[22:03] Huh? Ah, you don't get any more special than when a family member comes home. Huh? This was no half-hearted, lackluster effort of forgiveness and acceptance.

this was the full-blown, this was the real deal, nothing held back. Why? The lost son was found. Huh? According to the pattern that we've seen in the previous verses, you can expect to party.

Huh? Why? Because gladness, not grumbling, is the order of the day when God's grace is extended. Huh? That's what Jesus was trying to teach in that day.

what he was teaching and the command did go out from the Father. Let's eat! Let's celebrate! Let the banquet begin! Huh?

Guess who's coming to the banquet? Huh? The person that's been out in the cold. Huh? I love the movie Antoine Fisher. Perhaps some of you have seen it.

[23:02] It's about a son that's been disconnected from his family for years. And he was encouraged by his psychiatrist. Son, you need to go and try to find your family.

He had had such bad experiences but finally got the courage to do it. Finally found them. Found his mother. But there was no real welcome there.

She had been on drugs. There's a scene at the end of the movie that includes a party where this young man is coming home. I mean, there is a spread that's going to rival some of your Thanksgiving dinners in a few weeks.

It was spread out and then there was the matriarch of the family. Nobody was going to do anything until Big Mama gave the word. The table spread full of all kinds of food and guess what?

He is welcomed into the family and welcomed home. Why the party? The answer to that is in verse 24, isn't it?

[24:09] This my son was dead. He's alive today. He's lost and he's found and they begin to celebrate. Why the party? Because gladness.

Not grumbling is the order of the day when God's grace is prevailing. Lost and found in joy. End of story.

Not so. There are two sons. One has returned home. Where's the older son? The remainder of the story is about him.

The saga of the younger son, the superlative grace of a loving father and then the sad state of the older son in verses 25 through 32.

We know the son is not at the party, is he? He's in the field. He's doing the older son thing. He's dutiful and predictable.

[25:06] He does things by the book. He's lawful and legalistic and loyal. He's been at home all this time. He has a good work ethic but he doesn't have his father's grace ethic.

It's not rubbed off on him. How do you respond when you see someone getting what they don't deserve? You ever been in that situation? I wouldn't have given to them.

They don't deserve it. Matter of fact, I did more than him or her. Huh? How do you respond when someone is getting something that it seems like they don't deserve?

Huh? If things were up to you, you wouldn't be kind and generous. They need to learn the lesson. They need to earn their way back into family graces.

Hmm? How telling. The older son got angry, didn't he? Now, if this reminds you of the attitude of the religious leaders, it should. They would have the outcasts jump through their religious hoops.

[26:14] grace. Huh? But here's grace that beams so brightly in the younger son's life, it radiates also in this son's life. The father who would graciously receive the younger son here goes out to entreat, to issue an invitation, if you will, to the older son.

but to no avail. He would have nothing of grace. His own works that loomed so large in his mind and what the father had not done for him.

The son of yours, verse 30, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you fattened the calf for him. Huh? But the last word would not be his.

It was the father's. And what a fitting word it is in verses 31 and 32. Son, you're always with me. All that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and he's alive. He's lost then. He's found. So, Jesus' words are corrective.

[27 : 30] Given the attitude of the religious leaders about who was actually, who was the kingdom spread actually for that was being laid out for Jesus by Jesus.

Gladness, not grumbling, was to be the order in the day. Heaven was glad because sons had come home. And here's the deal. When sinners of all sorts repent, heaven rejoices.

And so should we. That's the point. When sinners of all sorts, religious or irreligious, when they repent, heaven rejoices.

And that needs to be the attitude of all who claim to be citizens of heaven. The religious leaders show their real colors in their response to sinners and publicans gravitating toward Jesus.

question for you and me today. How do we respond when invited guests, maybe those that we would not invite, make their way into the family?

[28 : 41] How do we respond when others begin to come from places that we don't live? How do we respond when the feasts have been spread and folks are coming in and they don't quite have the background or the family like we do?

How do we respond? Oh, Jesus helps us, doesn't he? May we find ourselves gravitating and listening to Jesus just like these religious outcasts did.

Oh, the gospel of Luke, friends, is helping us to do that. It's something happening even in our congregation. Huh? Luke is molding us and shaping us and sanctifying us and cleaning us up.

Huh? He's widening our arms. He's emptying our pockets. He's causing us to be generous, causing generosity to counter greed and wide arms to counter closed arms.

Oh, listen to him. Ah, guess who's coming to the banquet, folks? Somebody that's not like you. May we not be so bound by the rules of religion that we find ourselves grumbling about Jesus.

[30 : 11] Oh, Lord, them? Yeah, them. Them. Excuse me, them are coming. They are coming. Huh?

Huh? We must not promote the rule of religion. What's the rule of religion? Touch not, taste not, handle not. Huh? We must not promote those things over mercy, faith, and justice.

the tenets of the kingdom of God causes us to open our hearts and arms wide.

Huh? Isolation, friends, must not be the order of the day. The gospel is bigger and stronger. It's strong enough to hold us in the midst of a Christ-forsaken world.

And we must be aware of a Christian club, Christian huddle mentality. Huh? We must be intentional, friends, in seeking relationships with spiritually needy people compelled by Christ's example.

[31 : 24] May we find ourselves engaging our neighbors in heartfelt, real, and genuine kind of ways. Huh? Huh? Jesus represents the Father.

And we learn, we must live lives that welcome needy people wherever those needs exist. May God help us to be sinner-friendly kind of people so that we can rejoice in Him.

What am I saying today? When sinners of all sorts repent, heaven rejoices. So should we. And may all kinds of sinners, religious or irreligious, find their way to the feast that is the gospel.

May we be faithful proclaimers and lovers of it. In Jesus' name, amen. Lord, we love you and we give thanks to you for this familiar text.

But we need it. We need it in the queue that is the gospel of Luke. May it sanctify us and purify us.

[32 : 43] May if there's anyone outside the family today, may they see the Father running and He's done it through the cross, through the gospel, with open arms and hearts to all who are here today.

In Christ's name, amen. Let's stand and sing together.