

PM Luke 15 A father and two brothers

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[0 : 00] And it's one of the Gospels, the Gospel of Luke, and we'll be reading from chapter 15.! If the Pew Bible is the same as this one, it could be on page 1112.

These Gospels are like four photos of the life of Jesus.

Three of them are quite similar in a sense, insofar as they use the same sort of aspects of the life of Christ.

But the fourth one, John, is a bit different, and it's easy to see that just reading them. And Luke here is picking up on the criticism that Jesus has consistently received by religious leaders, who were existing, obviously, at the time that he lived.

So we're going to pick up this situation at chapter 15. And Luke records this about this episode of Jesus' life.

[1 : 31] Now, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him, hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes, religious leaders, grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

So Jesus told them this parable. A parable is a story that's got a lesson contained in it. That's all I think we need to know at the moment.

So Jesus told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so I tell you, that is the Pharisees and the scribes. There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

[3 : 05] Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

And, if you like furthermore, he said, There was a man who had two sons, and a younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his field to feed pigs.

[4 : 30] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger?

I will arise and go to my father, and 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. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and

let us eat and celebrate.

For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

[6 : 00] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him. And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.

Amen. So if you could turn back with me to Luke chapter 15. And you'll notice there as we read Luke chapter 15, that Jesus shared three parables.

[7 : 27] Now we're not going to be looking in any detail at the first two parables, but we're going to concentrate on what is probably more known and called, actually in the Bible here, the parable of the prodigal son.

I want to suggest right enough that it should be called the parable of a father and two brothers. And I want to alert you to, I think, the major truth that Jesus is seeking to accomplish in giving those parables is the nature and attitude of God towards sinners and towards lost sinners.

Now, you'll notice at the very beginning of this chapter that the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. And you'll notice it goes on to say, so he told them this parable.

And you'll notice that in verse 11, after he has told these two shorter parables, he goes on and they're joined by the conjunctive word, and, and he said.

[9 : 10] So all of these parables are aimed at the criticism that has just been leveled at Jesus at the beginning of this chapter.

The tax collectors were drawing near and the scribes and the Pharisees grumbled and said, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

And in order to grasp the truths of this parable, these three parables, but the one that we are going to be looking at in particular, the first thing that we must realise is this is Jesus' answer to them in the form of these parables.

This is how Jesus answers this criticism. And of course, this criticism is that they think that Jesus shouldn't be associating or receiving or being around sinners and certainly not eating with them. They think that that's beneath a righteous man and a godly man. And they think probably it's even beneath God.

[10 : 27] And Jesus is about to show them that they are far from correct. Now, in the Victorian era, the educated gentry and middle classes seemed to be upright and righteous.

While those in the margins of Victorian society were seen, if you like, as sinners. Or so it seemed. In William Shakespeare's play Hamlet, when his mother asks why he seems with his inky black cloak or clothes to be making an unseemly show of grief over the death of his father, Hamlet replies, Seems, madam.

Nay, it is. I know not seems. In this culture of Jesus, it seemed that the Pharisees were the righteous ones.

They were the ones that had constructed 613 additional oral laws to the laws of Moses.

And they were the ones to be fair to them that in the time of something called a Maccabean revolt against the people that were desecrating the temple in Jerusalem around, say, something like BC 140-150, they took a stand and they became known as the separate ones which is the meaning of the word Pharisee.

[12 : 22] Pharisee. But you know, down through the decades and down through the times, they started to become self-righteous.

Their religion was a religion of outwardness with no inward compassion. And so they did not associate with sinners and they thought that was a wonderful thing to do and that was part of their righteousness.

So Jesus is trying to instruct them here and in these two parables he's trying to say to them, look, think about it, you've got it all wrong about God and about me.

Surely you, if you lost one of your sheep, would go out and try and find it. And surely you would be celebrating when you found it.

And surely if you were like this woman in my parable who lost a coin and searched for it and found it, surely you would be rejoicing and you would be celebrating.

[13 : 38] And then Jesus turns the screw about ten times tighter because what Jesus is about to do is show these Pharisees the worst of the worst sinners and he's going to show them how God reacts to those sinners through the father figure in the parable and he's going to turn the spotlight on these Pharisees in the older brother.

let's look then at the younger son first. In verse 12 the younger of them said to his father father give me the share of property that is coming to me.

Now in actual fact there are two ways that a parent and a father in these days could bequeath his inheritance!

or his estate! One was if he died! But the other one was he could bequeath some of it while he was still alive!

and so you might say that this young son here he wasn't in fact doing anything that was criminal or illegal in asking his father for his portion but it does when you look at the whole story of this person of this younger son it does look like he had a plan and it does look like his plan wasn't honourable and it does look like the language that Luke uses to describe his request and in the original language it's much more terse give me the share of property that's coming to me there was something aggressive about it and it wasn't that he was asking could you give me a wee bit of money for some project or something like that he wanted the lot and he divided and the father divided the property between them and not many days later which is an indication of this plan that [16 : 27] I'm suggesting he probably had anyway not too many days later he gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country interesting he obviously felt that if only he could be released out of the chains and clutches of his home life and get as far away from that not simply space wise and geographic wise but far away from it in terms of attachment emotionally and everything else if only he could do that that would bring him some kind of happiness happiness it's hard to believe that he didn't think this would bring him happiness as the utilitarian philosopher

James Stuart Mill once said he argued that every single human being whether they're fully conscious of it or not but unconsciously and deep down what is it they're looking for my mother used to say everybody's looking for something David Mill said it's happiness and this lad seems to think that he's getting on the road to happiness so he goes into this far country and he squandered his property in reckless living and you know the older son later on accuses him of spending his time with prostitutes and when he had spent everything in his reckless odyssey a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need

C.S. Lewis once said that in our prosperity God whispers to us and in our need God screams to us and here he is and he spent everything there was a severe famine and he began to be in need so he had to hire himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs and he was longing to be fed with the pod that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything now the interesting thing I think is this you take the great so called celebrities of our world film stars music stars sports stars and all the rest of it I guarantee it if there's a happiness test given to them most of them will probably be less happy than what we see in

Glasgow the ordinary five eight in the streets of Glasgow as Jesus put it this way and it's a wonderful saying a person's possessions a person's sorry life or happiness does not consist in the possessions that they have and that is because we're not just material people we're not just physical people we're not just matter we are matter but much more and here he is he's tried it and he's down at the lowest nader he's down there in the gutter and you know it says when he came to himself in the original language it's quite intensive there's a little particle and it's a very intensive particle something like when he came into himself and you know he started thinking how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread but

I perish here with hunger I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him father I have sinned against heaven against God and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son treat me as one of your hired servants here is a perfect picture of I think I quoted it already tonight of what Jesus said he that loves his life shall lose it and he that loses his life for my sake will find it and he's experienced this he's reached rock bottom and he's come to his senses there's a hymn we're going to sing as a final hymn it's one of my favorites and it begins with this with these words Lord from the depths I cry to you and here this person is crying to

[22 : 13] God already I believe from the depths of his rock bottom state and here Jesus has painted a picture for the Pharisees oh of a sinner all right a sinner plus a sinner mega sinner how shall God respond to this person will it be like the Pharisees who accused Jesus of welcoming sinners and eating with them and what we must remember is this Jesus is not only a redeemer and a saviour he's a revealer Jesus famously said in John 14 he that have seen me has seen the father he didn't mean he didn't mean just physically seeing him but observing his entire demeanor his entire atmosphere his entire mood his entire interest in people his entire compassion his willingness to come and die on the cross for us his willing to swap places with us that he as Luther put it a great German Christian and reformer who became the greatest sinner ever because he hung on that cross with the weight of the world's sin pressing down on his shoulders okay Pharisees listen to this as he arose and came to his father and he arose and came to his father but while he was still a long way off his father saw him this is Jesus picturing God for the Pharisees because the Pharisees seem to think that it's not God like what Jesus is doing welcoming sinners and daring to associate with them and share the same space with them but while he was still a long way off the father saw him and just as he had been saying in those other two short parables when you remember the first one at least he said if a shepherd loses one sheep does he not leave the 99 and go out looking for that lost sheep is that not the case

Jesus says to them and here the interesting thing is the picture of the shepherd is a picture of God seeking us of course it says seek the Lord while he may be found but before we ever sought God he sought us as one great theologian put it God refused to acquiesce in our rebellion against him while we were still sinners God so loved the world and gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him may not perish here is the father he's been longing for him to come home he's been watching for him to come home and he wants him to come home and he felt compassion this word compassion is such a powerful word the the the original word is a gut wrenching powerful feeling and ran he couldn't even wait this father for the lost son to reach him that he ran out to reach the returning sinner and he embraced him and kissed him if that's not a beautiful and wonderful picture of what it means to

God when we come home when we truly come home and you know truly coming home is coming to Jesus Christ have you come to him coming to church is wonderful like articulate his repentance to the father.

And the father interrupted him. The father interrupted him. But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe.

[28 : 59] The robe is for a son. I'm not going to say you'll never be my son again because you've blackened yourself too much.

You've soiled the honour of my household and name. No, no, no, no, no. Quick!

Bring the best robe. I can't help being a wee bit allegorical. Allegorical is seeing some truth about the Bible in nearly every word that it says.

You used to get ancient interpreters doing that in the third and fourth century. I'm not saying that it's illegitimate in total or anything like that. But if we come to Christ Christ gives us his robe of righteousness of perfect righteousness of a righteousness that will never fade or never stain and he gives us that robe forever.

Amen. And he put that robe on him and he put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.

[30 : 36] Slaves did not wear shoes or sandals. You're not going to be a slave. You're my son. And bring the fattened calf in the culture of Jesus families and homes would keep a fattened calf.

Like my wife is here and we got a big huge turkey quite a wee while ago and it's in the freezer and I've said a couple of times we need to get that out and eat it.

No no I'm waiting for the right amount of people to come. Well they kept this fattened calf in Jesus day and it was for a special occasion and what could be more special than the homecoming of a lost child a lost son.

And so Jesus is saying this is God and this is what like he is and you're accusing me of welcoming sinners.

How about that for a welcome? Finally what about the older son?

[32 : 09] The older son is actually hitting the bullseye here right at the Pharisees.

The first thing that you notice in this story that Jesus says is this he's outside with all his religion with all his supposed interest in the law and in ritual cleansing just to see I think in Luke 11 yeah so listen to this this is Jesus in chapter 11 of Luke and I'm picking it up from verse 42 but woe to you Pharisees for you tithe mint this is what do you call these things Mary and basil herbs that's the word I was looking for sorry woe to you

Pharisees for you tithe mint and rue and every herb ah and neglect justice and the love of God those you ought to have done without neglecting the others woe to you Pharisees for you love the best seat in the synagogues you know thinking they are the bee's knees woe to you for you are like unmarked graves and people walk over them without knowing it these are just these are the sort of confrontations that Jesus had that's a flavour of it so you can imagine they are definitely wanting to find criticism against them because they are unmasking their hypocrisy anyway back to the older son he is outside and by the way he never goes inside in this parable the parable ends with him still outside the

Pharisees I think Jesus even said something like this had shut themselves out of the kingdom of God and had shut the kingdom of God out of the people notice the first emotion of the older son can you imagine him there he is he's been out in the field makes his way home and he hears this commotion he hears this loud noise of music and dancing and celebration and he called one of the servants and said what do these things mean and the servant said your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received them back safe and sound verse 28 but he was angry but he was angry but he was angry the father felt powerful contortions of compassion but he was angry where's the mercy of

God in his bones he refused to go in he refused to have any part in welcoming the sinner and in eating with them tax collectors and sinners drawing near to hear him and the Pharisees and scribes grumbled this man receives sinners and eats with them his father came out and entreated him but he answered his father look these many years I've served you and I never disobeyed your command yet you never gave me a young goat that

[37 : 21] I might celebrate with my friends so he's more concerned about himself more concerned about me more concerned that he's been as he sees it serving his dad but it looks as though the very fact that he's stating that indicates that he had no affectionate relationship with his dad that he didn't feel it was an honour to serve his dad and a privilege his Christianity if you like or his religiosity is mechanistic rather than intimate and relational and having affection and love but in

Lotus's contentious speech but when this son of yours not your brother no but when this son of yours who has devoured your property with prostitutes he killed the fattened calf for him Jesus was full of compassion that was one of the great characteristics that was noticed and that's why people I used to say to people isn't it astonishing that the holiest man that has ever walked the planet the masses of the population came to hear him holiness doesn't mean aloofness holiness doesn't mean self righteousness and

I'm better than the other if we go back then to these words as I close I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him father I have sinned against heaven that's God and before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son that kind of repentance is welcomed by God in extravagant and in a lavish manner if you haven't said those words literally

I wonder if the spirit of those words is in your heart I have sinned against God I am no longer worthy to be called your son and yet that same God came to seek the lost the lost sinner that's you and that's me may the Lord bless these thoughts to each one of us for his glory and for our eternal good and!

God to God you God to you to!