

Lost in Sin

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Preacher: Rev David C Meredith

[0 : 00] Let's open our Bibles again in the passage we read, Luke chapter 15, reading again in verse 13. These words, very simply, there he squandered his property in reckless living.

President Thomas Jefferson, of course, was one of the better known presidents of the United States of America. And on one occasion, he was traveling with a group of people. And they were traveling alongside this river, and the river was overflowing in a flood.

And it was very difficult to pass over. In fact, it was extremely dangerous. And so many of them passed over. And there was one man who was walking, and he asked if he could go on Jefferson's horse.

And, of course, the turbulent water flowed, and Jefferson and the man went over, and they managed to cross the river. He was then shocked to find out that he had asked the president of the United States to take him over.

But he was asked, why was it that you picked Jefferson? And he said this. He says, all I know is that in some of your faces was written the answer no, and in others was the answer yes.

[1 : 21] His was a yes face. Now, I wonder this morning, what face do we have? What face do we have as individuals? Do we have a yes face?

A face that's inviting us towards ourselves? A face that's inviting us towards our own lives? What face do we have as a congregation? Is it a no face?

Or is it a yes face, where people feel safe to run in to the message in which we proclaim? Well, there is no doubt that the Lord Jesus had a yes face.

And the key to this particular chapter is in the first two verses. Because it says there, verse 1, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him.

And so why was that? Because he had a yes face. We speak today about a place being a safe place. It's words and language that we use in our own day-to-day work situations.

[2 : 23] And so Jesus had that safe place for those who were tax collectors and sinners. However, verse 2, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

They clearly had no faces. And so what we're doing this morning is we're looking at this very well-known passage, the passage of the prodigal son. And we're going to perhaps apply it to two ways, in two ways.

Number one, as a congregation, as a group of people, do you have that spirit of the Father inviting people in? And what about us as individuals?

Where are we in this particular parable? What's the culture of our own church? So again, by way of introduction, we look here and it's called in the ESV, the parable of the prodigal son.

And of course, there's a discussion, there's a debate about what this parable is called. The prodigal son is just put in there by editors. It's not part of the Bible.

[3 : 30] Some folks say it's the parable of the waiting father. That would be another great title, wouldn't it, for the story. Others call it the parable of the three sons.

You've got, of course, the younger son who was prodigal. He went astray. And then you have the elder son who was judgmental and who was critical of the actions of the younger son.

And then, of course, you have the son of God who is the father, if you like, welcoming men and women to come to him. So it's a very well-known passage.

Many of you here know this particular story in the Bible. But it's a great illustration of the gospel. It's a great illustration of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's what we are all about as a congregation. Those of you who are believers, and perhaps those of you who are not. Those of you who are receptive, and those of us who are perhaps

non-receptive.

[4 : 33] So as we look at the passage, I just want to notice three things. Three very simple things summarized in three very simple words. The first word I'm going to use is lost.

Because there was a point when the younger son was lost. Now, where was he lost? Where did it all begin? The traditional answer is, well, he was lost in verse 15.

And there he was. We all know the story. He was hired to a servant in the far country. And there he was, ending up feeding pigs. But his lostness began at verse 12.

He was lost before he even left home. He left home before he even left home. Notice what he says there in verse 12. Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

Well, you cannot get over the shock value that that would have had for the original hearers. We have a shame-honor society here.

[5 : 39] We have a society where age was honored. We have a society where being a father was the patriarch. And you simply did not dishonor your father.

It was shocking. Many of you have traveled in the East. You witnessed this shame culture. And so what the son was essentially saying was, the deal was that the elder son got two-thirds and the younger son got one-third.

And so what the younger son was essentially saying was, I want my inheritance now. The Greek word is bios. I want your life.

I want you to give up your life for me. I want you to liquidate the assets. And give me a third. Now, when do you normally get the inheritance?

We have an expression that when we're off on a cruise, where if one is fortunate to do that, someone will say, what are you doing? You say, well, I'm spending my children's inheritance.

[6 : 44] And, you know, you might get a little chuckle from everyone apart from your children. And that's an expression that we use. So when do you get your inheritance? You get your inheritance when someone passes on when they die.

So the younger son was saying, Dad, I wish you were dead. This is absolutely shocking. Well, what state of lostness was he in here?

He was basically saying, I want you dead. I want you out of my life. Can I suggest that this is a picture of many people in our own culture and in our own society?

We all know, of course, that God is our father. There is a sense in which God is the father of all men. The Bible says that. God is a universal father in that sense.

But we find here that this one, this my, what he wants is, he wants the benefits of the father, but he doesn't want the relationship with the father.

[7 : 49] He's saying here in verse 13, basically, I want to be free. And yet we know that sin promises so much, and yet it leads to misery.

Sin promises so many openings and so many opportunities. And yet in the case of this young man, as in the case of every single one of us, it leads only to misery.

And so we see here he's lost. I think there's two elements here where he is especially lost. First of all, we notice here there's the rejection of creation.

Remember what I said? He's saying, Father, I want all that you can give me, but I don't want you. And that's what folk in their own culture are essentially saying to God.

He is a God of creation. He is a God who's given us absolutely everything. Sure, in this world, many of us have got bad stories. Many of us have had difficulties in life.

[8 : 55] But yet there are other great things. And this world is a great place. He's given us the gift of relationship. He's given us homes. He's given us food. He's given us this gorgeous scenery that we see round about us.

He's given us sun. He's given us rain. He's given us so many good things. And we take, take, take, take all the time. God's gifts are described to us as being good and perfect.

They are always good. Many of you are blessed to be parents and grandparents. And there is nothing that changes your view of parenthood than being a parent yourself.

And so there are times when you see your willful teenager. And aren't teenage years amazing?

There are some of you who are still in these teenage years.

And the interesting thing is that there's a certain point in growing up where some young folk know so much more than their parents.

[9 : 59] It's unbelievable the insights that they have. And there is a confidence. There is, some would say, a cockiness. There is a sense of, oh, these old folk, they know absolutely nothing.

And then your memory goes back to that day when they were two days old and you did something that saved their life. Your memory goes back of how you bathed them.

Your memory goes back of how you went without to give them. Your memory goes back to how you gave so much for these children. And sometimes it seems as if the children forget that once they were wholly dependent on you, that once they could do absolutely nothing of themselves, that's exactly the same with God.

God who has given us the very air that we breathe. And I very often think of this when I read about atheistic thinkers, that the very logic that they use to debunk the Christian faith, the very capacity for logic, the very brain that they have, the very philosophies that they so often employ, the very education, the insights that they have, many of them have been given to them by the God who gave them the ability to think.

And yet they have taken these gifts and they have thrown them in God's face. You're lost by creation. I want your things, but I don't want you.

[11 : 26] You almost see that in verse 12 where it says, give me, give me, give me and go. This is Independence Day. This is freedom. Where are you and I in this situation?

We see him here. He's lost. There's a rejection of creation. But there's also what I've called here a rejection of covenant. What do I mean by this? There was a father-son relationship and there's no such thing as an individual.

We're all born into families. What about this morning in this church? Many folk here have been baptized as an infant.

What does that mean? Well, there's one particular tradition that says, oh, that's nonsense when we're baptized as a child. We don't remember. I don't remember my baptism. What does it mean? That's the very point. That is the point. God blessed us and God took us into the church family at a very point when we were not aware of it.

[12 : 36] We were placed in a place of absolute privilege. You know, sometimes we are in a place of privilege and we are not aware of it and there is no greater privilege than being brought up within the covenant community in the church of God.

You remember, of course, a well-known story. Those of you of a certain age will know the story. You can complete it. There's a policeman from Lewis and he's working in the Metropolitan Police Force and it's Churchill's funeral.

And, you know, Churchill's funeral, I just remember it and no more. The pomp and ceremony, the dignity, the streets were hushed as the cortege was taken through the streets.

And the man's cog says, this is amazing. Remember what he said, where I come from, back in the islands, everybody is buried like that.

Born into a community where there is a sense of value. That is nothing compared to being born into the church of God where there is a privilege of hearing the gospel, there is a privilege of hearing the good news of Jesus, there is a privilege of knowing that Jesus Christ lived and died and that he will come again and that there is good news.

[14 : 01] That is a privileged situation. But this man was rejecting creation and he was rejecting covenant.

What about us? Are we rejecting the very upbringing? Now, there are elements in our upbringing, of course, which were negative. We all know that.

There are elephants in the room here. There are things in the church that were not good. There was behavior, so it was over the top. Of course we know that. But if we push all that beside, at the side, we hear this great story of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and the gospel of good news.

And so in the New Testament, the legacy was seen as a sacred legacy. Folks, you have in your community and in your church upbringing, a sacred legacy.

You have been told. You have been baptized into the church of the living God. And yet, so many of us are simple, serial covenant breakers.

[15 : 20] And think of what Jesus did for us. When I read here the parable of the prodigal son, we read here of a man who went into the far country, does that not remind you of another story in the Bible of another son who went into the far country?

Does that not remind you of the Lord Jesus Christ who went into the far country for 40 days being tempted of the devil? Here, this was the prodigal who went into the far country and fell.

Jesus was the Savior who went into the far country and lived. This is the prodigal who went into the far country and who needed to be saved. Whereas, Jesus is the one who went into the far country in order that he was able to save defeating the devil.

What about us? Are we lost? So often that word conjures up, you know, the spirit of lostness. It's someone who is being watched.

That's one of the problems about testimonies. Testimonies are good. Don't get me wrong, but very often, you know, we hear these very dramatic testimonies of someone who was really very, very low and drink and drugs and really lived a dissolute life.

[16:43] And there can be almost a picture of, well, that's the pattern. That's a really lost person. And yet, you can be just as lost in a two-piece suit and a collar and tie in a church.

You can be just as lost with a respectable outlook in life if we have declared independence from God, I do not want this man to rule over me.

I was raised in the island of Skye and, as you say, some folk may say, well, it's not really an island that's got a bridge.

And when the bridge was built, there was a toll in the bridge and there was a character called Robbie the Pict. And Robbie the Pict said that his argument was, I'm not Scottish, I'm a Pict.

I am not subject to the laws of this land. I don't need to pay the toll to go over the bridge. I don't need to pay road tax in my car. I don't need to adhere to the laws of our own society.

[17:48] He declared independence from everybody else. Well, it's a cute story with a somewhat eccentric individual, but really, that's essentially what many of us are doing, declaring independence from God.

I will not have this man to rule over me. I did it. My way. Isn't that the most popular song sung at funerals in the UK?

We live in a society where in the UK humanist funerals have taken over from religious funerals and that's the number one song. I did it my way.

And here the picture is, well, that surely is breathtaking taking arrogance like a child saying to its parents, what did you ever do for me?

Parents, what do you think when your child, if your child said to you, what did you ever do for me? Parenthood is the ultimate sacrifice.

[19:03] It costs time and it costs money. Add it up. It is a very expensive. It's give, give, give, give, give. And for a child to say, that meant nothing.

How much more? And that's to God. So, we see here the first word is lost. The second word is searching. Searching.

He was lost, but notice that word in verse 17. When he came to himself. When he came to himself. That's a great expression we find here that he, he realized that there was no satisfaction in this world.

There's a phrase in that that I really didn't notice on the first reading. It says here that there was a famine in that country. Verse 14.

A severe famine arose in the country. There is a famine coming. There are times when we realize that our own resources are wholly inadequate for the issues that are facing us.

[20:20] You can have all the money in the world, but when you are facing the final challenge of death. The money will not save.

You can be witty, you can be socially at ease, you can have many, many gifts, you can be quick in your mind, you can be someone who is incredibly resourceful, but we find here that if you break from God you are absolutely on your own.

So this man came to himself. He realized that he had offended not just himself. Are you ever hurt? I know that I'm hurt. I was analyzing this recently. I feel more hurt when I'm hurt, when my world has become upside down, rather than when I have hurt God.

And that's the great picture here. When he came to himself, he says in verse 18, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. Alcoholics Anonymous is a great movement.

[21:37] It's helped so many folks get through the problems of addiction. And it has so many insights into human nature. It really is interesting.

It's interesting that when their insights into human nature are at the most sharp, they are also at the most biblical. And it often tells the difference between someone who is remorseful and someone who is genuinely cut to the core.

being remorseful is being sad that you've been caught. Repentance means that you realize that you've sinned against God.

And so we find here that he comes to himself, what is the word we're looking at there, he is searching and he is found and he realizes, I need to go home.

We'll see that in a little bit more. But we find here that this dear man, he comes to himself and he's searching and those who search find him.

[22 : 49] Bob Geldof is an extremely resourceful individual. remember in 1995 he organized his live aid in response to the Ethiopian famine.

It was a phenomenal logistical achievement. He organized concerts simultaneously or back to back rather in London and I think it was in Philadelphia.

He raised 150 million pounds. He got the royalty of the rock stars of his day together to perform for free.

He managed all these egos and he got them to do stuff for nothing and he raised, as I say, 150 million pounds. And at the end of it, he said, is that it?

Have you ever had one of those, is that it, moments? What do you live for? Well, many folk live for retirement.

[23 : 54] If you're in my age group, you'll retire when you're 94 if we're doing any justice. Is that the time we pay off our mortgage, we retire?

Is that it? Is that all there is to life? We get the big job, is that it? We have the relationship which seems to promise so much, is that it?

We have the big bank balance, is that it? No, there is a searching for more. What are the two words we've seen? Well, we've seen the word loss.

We've seen the word searching. The third word that's intriguing in this passage is the word home.

The word home. In verse 14, there is a famine, and in verse 15, we realize he is in a very, very sad state.

Verse 17, when he came to himself, and he says in verse 18, I will arise and go to my father. Home.

[25 : 02] What is home? Where is home? home is not a place.

Home is a relationship. Home is not a place you go to. Home is a people that you link to.

The house where I was brought up a few months ago, it was just a house. It was a shell. It was lived in by someone else, but it wasn't home.

Home is where my family is. Home is where my people are. So there is this man, he's in the pigsty. You think for a Jewish boy, the Talmud said that cursed is a man who feeds swine.

This is a Jewish boy, and pigs were seen to be the very lowest of the low. They were unclean. Pigs are like rats in the Islamic and Jewish tradition.

[26 : 09] That's the way they think about it. Here he is, he is feeding all these people. Rembrandt is a picture of the prodigal son. In fact, he has several pictures of the prodigal son.

One is of a shaved man, as if he is bald-headed, shaved, as if he's a concentration camp victim. He has no identity.

Here he is, he's with the pigs. He's less than human. You see, his animal instincts had taken over. And here he is like an animal.

People sacrifice anything to succeed. And you look at the corporate world, you look at the business world, and sometimes you see a little more than the behavior that's similar to animals in a zoo.

Brute instinct. this man here, he treated people as indispensable. But he no longer longs just for food, he longs for home.

[27 : 18] What about you? You live in a home, but you know that there's a greater home. You know that there is this thing in your life which is not fulfilled.

You have a lovely family, you have a marvelous scenario, you're living the dream, you're back home here in many ways, and you thought that even by coming home that you would be home, and yet there's one more piece of the jigsaw missing.

It's because you're not finally home. The journey is a process, but it really is a wonderful situation because we find here that there's another character.

His father, verse 20 there, what does it say? His father saw him and is filled with compassion. How would you treat this scenario?

The son has taken all the money, he's made a mess of his life, and there you are, you get the text, dad, I'm coming home. And you say to your wife, he's coming home.

[28 : 35] And you sit there tapping your feet, thinking, hmm, we'll see. We'll see if he's contrite. We'll see if he's really sorry.

We'll see if he's made a mess of his life, and let's see him eat a bit of humble pie. because he had broken all the mores of society.

He had broken the honor culture. What is your view of God? Some years ago, when I was a chaplain in the school, I had a chaplain's assistant.

It didn't go to my church, but the chaplain's assistant said on one occasion to the children, poison girl, I want you to draw a picture of God. You know that old song, There May Be Trouble Ahead?

That was kind of ringing in my mind. Why does the Bible forbid us to draw a picture of God?

Because what is your picture of God?

[29 : 43] The picture here is of the Father who runs to the errant son and throws his arms around him.

Now, in this culture, fathers did not run. Again, it's a very hierarchical society.

You take the Queen, Her Majesty the Queen. I love the Queen. She's the mother of our nation.

She's so simple. Forgive me if you are a Republican.

forgive me this transgression. But she's a beautiful woman. She's serene. She's a woman of duty and supreme dignity.

Does the Queen run? No. This father forgot all the dignity.

[30 : 43] Nobility never runs, but this man ran to the son. God runs to us. That's what God is doing this morning. The picture of God, the picture of grace.

You may say, well, surely it's us running to him. No, that is utterly man-centered. God runs to us.

grace. That's grace. The God we have wronged. The God we have said, I don't want you in my life.

He runs to us. grace. I've just moved into a new realm of grandfatherhood.

And it changes your life. You have this little infant who comes into your house and in ten seconds destroys your sitting room.

[31 : 52] Just doing a demolition job. if you come into my house and you destroyed my sitting room, I wouldn't be happy.

But I love her. She's mine. And I will kneel down and I will clear up the mess because she's mine.

beloved, this is the message of this church. This is the message of the Bible. This is the message of grace. For the man and woman who repents and turns around and says, I will go to my father's house.

Do not be afraid. sometimes you fear going to meetings because of the response that you get.

You say, there is no fear of him. With arms wide open, he will not just welcome you. What does the text say?

[33 : 10] He threw himself on him. We waken up this morning to this glorious news and will we tell others about how lostness can be overturned.

Amen. Let's pray.