

A Father and Two Brothers

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[0 : 0 0] Let's read now in one of the Gospels in Luke's Gospel, chapter 15. Luke's Gospel, chapter 15. As most people probably know, the Bible has got two halves, what we call the Old Testament and then the New Testament. And at the very beginning of the New Testament, there are four accounts of the life and times of Jesus. And this is the third account by someone called Luke. And he speaks about, you know, Jesus' activity and his healing and his miracles and his teaching. And we come to chapter 15, where he's being engaging with tax collectors and sinners. And we begin the reading then at the beginning of chapter 15. Now, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him. And the Pharisees and scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. So, he told them this parable. So, note immediately the connection. The Pharisees have criticized him and now he's going to, in response to that criticism, he's going to tell them this parable.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 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 his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so, I tell you, I tell you, that is these Pharisees and the teachers of the law, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Or, what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, 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 then further, or as the NIV puts it, he continued, there was a man who had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. And he divided 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 the country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 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.

[3 : 5 5] 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. 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 fatted 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 fatty 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 and was lost and is found. Amen. May the Lord add his own blessing to the reading of his word.

Now, this is no doubt one of the most famous parables that Jesus shared among all his parables.

[6 : 22] It's timeless and it's more than a parable. And I hope to say something about that comment I've just made a bit later in the sermon. Jesus was the greatest teacher that probably ever lived.

He was able to convey truth through storytelling. And not just convey it, but convey it in such a crystal clear and powerful way.

He was able to point to cultural events, events that were common knowledge to people and use those events to get across his message. I have to confess that I'm absolutely hopeless at illustrations and stories and things like that. Now, those three parables go together. You can see that when Jesus starts to answer the Pharisees' criticism and then he gives that second parable and I think the NIV picks it up well and says he continued. So, these three parables go together. A parable in literature is usually a story that has one single moral lesson.

And if the single sort of, I'm not saying the single, but certainly one great theme in those three parables is lost and found. Every single one of them has that theme in its parable.

In other words, you could look at it this way. The common theme underlying these parables is this. Humanity is lost and needs to be found. As we go through this parable, we'll find out what it means to be lost and what it means to be found. The parable, while the parable reaches its climax and is moving towards, in a sense, that climax of the elder brother at the end of the parable, because Jesus is using the elder brother, as we will see, as a picture of the Pharisees who were criticizing him. On the other hand, in my view, the greater truth that shines with brilliance in this parable is the picture given of God. And we have to remember that Jesus is not only a redeemer, he's a revealer. And the two, of course, are closely intertwined and connected.

[9 : 17] And when Jesus is teaching, he's putting forth revelation, he's revealing something about a truth, but in general, he's always revealing and disclosing God. That's what you see in John's gospel in chapter 1. It tells us. There's a statement there that nobody has ever seen God, but Jesus Christ has shown him. And that's why Jesus Christ could say, he that has seen me has seen the Father. So, we must not forget that not only is Jesus our redeemer, but he is the revealer. The revealer of who we are and the revealer of our destiny and what it is that we need, that's for sure, but principally, he's the revelation of God himself. He that has seen me has seen the Father. And then this parable is going to stun, I believe, those Pharisees and teachers of the law with the revelation of God that he brings to them through this parable. So, before we get right into the parable, there's three things we're going to look at. We're going to look at the younger son, and then we're going to look at God's reaction to his repentance, if you like, and then we're going to look at the elder son.

What I love when I read statements like this, now, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him, and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

What I love about that is that I love when his enemies and his opponents capture the truth of the gospel in their gospel in their criticism. They're dead right. They are absolutely right. And if only they could say of themselves that they welcome and receive sinners and eat with them. But I love when his enemies and his opponents unwittingly in their criticism are actually articulating and vocalizing a great truth about our Savior Jesus Christ. So, he wants to answer their criticism. And how he answers their criticism is by exhibiting to them what I might call a grade A sinner. So, you're criticizing me, are you, for a receiving sinners. Let me just show you one that is received in this parable by the Father who stands for God. So, we read in verse 12 that this younger son said to his father,

Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. Now, there was two ways that a father could pass on his property. One was, well, he couldn't pass it on, obviously, but if he died, it could be passed on. But the other way was he could give it to his children during his life. So, there's a sense in which this person wasn't really asking for something that was illegal. But when we look at the whole picture that Jesus creates of this person, we can say that why did he want, as it were, to get back to inheritance now? It's because he wanted to get away from his father. He wanted to get away from his home.

He wanted to get away from its values. As he saw it, its constraints. And in a sense, it's a common story that has been repeated time and time again, has it not, throughout the history of people.

[13 : 51] There are some homes, right enough, that it would be right to flee from. But anyway, there he is, and he asks for his inheritance. He doesn't want to, what shall we say, live out his life and the principles of his life under these values of his father's house. He wants to be free.

He wants to make a pitch and make a strike for freedom. Okay, his father says, you've got it. You've got what you want. So, off he goes, and he journeys into a far country. Because, in a sense, that is what being lost is.

What is being lost is snatching and seizing control of our own life independently of God. And then he goes into a far country, far away from God. Remember that Jesus is a brilliant teacher. He doesn't want us just to think of the bare facts of the parable. He wants us to get beneath that parable and understand what he's really on about. He goes far away, and he squanders his property in reckless living.

There's a verse, another in Hebrews, a book in the New Testament called Hebrews. It says, this famous prophet Moses, he forsook the pleasures of sin for a season. Yeah, yeah, there can be pleasure in sin. And perhaps if we modernize this, we would say, so this person was loose in his morals, this person did drugs. This person quite liked drink, and he quite liked just partying non-stop.

He squandered everything in reckless living, and in verse 14, and when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

[16 : 35] How true is this of many who have followed in this young man's footsteps in this parable?

He spent everything, and he began to be in need. His odyssey in taking his part of the estate, his odyssey in going as far away as he could, psychologically, spiritually, and morally, as well as physically, his odyssey, where did it leave him?

In need. And it left him in need because of what an old Christian called Augustine said nearly 1600 years ago or something like that, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

There is something deep within us, a longing, sometimes a longing for something we do not know, but a longing, nonetheless, a yearning, a hope that there's something more to life than this sort of rat race and this constant cycle.

And because he was in need, he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into the fields to feed pigs.

[18 : 08] Not only did he lose his, what do you call it, his estate, his inheritance that he took, he lost his dignity.

And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything.

Here is a picture of someone who's lost. I wonder, is there anyone here can see any kind of tenuous even connection with this lost person in this parable?

But here's the thing, in verse 17, but when he came to himself, we're going to be singing, Lord from the depths I cried to you, Psalm 130, a wonderful psalm.

And somehow or other, in the midst of all that had happened to him, and all his disappointment, and all his indignity, somehow or other, there was some sort of voice deep down somewhere that began to direct him.

[19 : 38] But when he came to himself, verse 17, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger. Jesus once said, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Yeah, yeah, he was hungering and thirst after anything but righteousness. 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've 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. Now, C.S. Lewis once said, God whispers to us in our prosperity and screams to us in our difficult times.

Maybe God was screaming him, screaming at him, and he realized that he needs to get back. He needs to make the return journey.

[20 : 59] Because for sure, when it says there, he came to himself, I want to just bring before you, there are four things here in coming to himself that in my mind are important for genuine

heaven's joy and is that not absolutely amazing salvation

I wonder how often I have thought of that I wonder how often you have thought of that the thrill of joy that God has as we come home in repentance to accept his eternal love and his eternal gift of salvation salvation so what about the elder son well in verse 25 by the way this is a literary masterpiece and you get experts in literature saying this so don't just take it from me but it's a literary masterpiece because it's got so many wonderful ingredients in it almost of shock the way that the father welcomes the accusation about welcoming sinners the way that the father welcomes this person in the parable it's got great characterization it's got suspense it's got loads of things that make it a brilliant piece of literature apart from anything else now his older son was in the field now I don't want to take too much out of this but I may as well mention it so the first time that we come across the older son he ain't in the house of course he's out working in the field and he's just on his way home from a good day's work

I don't know the fact is he's not in the house that's all I can say to you and as he came and drew near to the house he heard music and dancing I'm interested that it said not just that he heard music but that he heard dancing my mother was a tap dancer and I suppose when she was tap dancing I could hear her dancing and I was a minister in Loch Inver a fishing village up in northwest Sutherland and in the village hall there used to be Kaley's family Kaley's and I was there Mary was there and you know not only could you hear the music but you could hear the dancing as well! What did he do?

Oh wow I better get in there quick! No he called one of his servants and asked them what these things meant now that aroused my suspicion when I read that why did he not just go in it's his home it's his dad it's his mum guess what I think he was always dreading if that younger brother returned and you know when he found out that the reason for the music and dancing was when the servant said to him you can imagine the tone of the servant your brother has come your father has killed the fattened calf because he's received them back safe and sound that not great verse 28 but he was angry angry angry where's this anger coming from why is he so angry and he refused to go in but we're not finished with the father that's why

[34 : 28] I think that the most brilliant light in this parable is the light of the picture of God what does his father do you want to be like that away you go then my father was a bit like that kind of strict person and he said you don't like it you know where the door is okay his father came out it says here and treated him must admit I do like I do like the NIV translation pleaded with him is that not wonderful is that not wonderful what's that saying I'll tell you I think it's saying the elder brother is Israel and Jesus had been going around to his own people pleading with them maybe God's been pleading with somebody in here for a long time to come home to the eternal warmth and love of

God God that didn't turn him in fact it got him in a more bolshy mood he says look these many years I've served you and I never disobeyed your command yet you never gave me even a young goat that I might celebrate and listen to the contemptuous tone of his but when this son of yours who has devoured your property with prostitutes you killed the fattened calf for him the father praised god he's got the last word and he said to him son notice he says to him son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours so is this son never been lost and always found and is still always found that's for you to make up your mind

I tell you what I think I think it's Israel he has in mind for this elder brother and I think that he's basically saying the offer Israel is called my son in the old testament and I think he's saying Israel how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers its chicks under its wings but you would not and the offer is still there it's not that every Pharisee were like these ones that Jesus was speaking to at that point there were Pharisees who believed in him and who followed him but the Pharisees as a whole group and especially the leaders and the leaders who were one might say hell bent and executing!

What was the problem really of this elder son?

I think he had three problems his first problem as with the Pharisees a sense of superiority and self righteousness that's his first problem remember another wee incident that Jesus shares with us in the gospels and it's the two people going into the temple to pray and one of them you can imagine them you know maybe his arms weren't folded there's another guy by the way and his head is down and he is looking pretty gloomy if you like and I say thank you God that I am not let these other people or even this guy that's here to my left or wherever he was because I fast and I do this and I do that and everything and the other one that was there it says in the account in the gospels he

wouldn't even lift up his eyes he shouted

[39 : 27] God be merciful to me and I think it could have been late professor Macleod that when I first realized that he said that the actual Greek says not just be merciful to me a sinner the sinner and the only descriptor that he could have for himself was before God the sinner the sinner and Jesus says who do you think went home justified it was the sinner I acknowledge said the person who had squandered his life I have sinned against God I have sinned against heaven have we acknowledged our sin and guilt before God do we acknowledge our sin and guilt before

God every day a sense of superiority and self righteousness and secondly a censorious and loveless spirit I'm afraid the Pharisees weren't filled with compassion I'm afraid the Pharisees wouldn't have ran and wouldn't have put the best robe on him and a ring on his finger and sandals in his shoes far from it and thirdly a rule based religion a religion bereft of intimacy and love and relationship that was his problem and that was their problem the Pharisees the father in that parable that's us closing now said everything

I have is yours the offer is still there but he refused to go in and certainly in terms of the parable he remained outside what about you tonight have you been refusing to come in out of the cold are you still lost or have you been found may the Lord bless these things to each of us and for his glory amen