

Lost And Found(1) - Rebellion And Repentance

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] We read from verse 11 down to verse 24. I'm going to look this morning at verses 11 to 20, or the first part of verse 20.

God willing, this evening we'll come to the second part of verse 20 on to verse 24. The parable is normally called the parable of the prodigal son.

Now you're always looking for a key verse sometimes when you're reading Scripture, when you're studying the Word of God, you're looking for a key verse which often appears in a passage or in a chapter or maybe in a cluster of chapters together.

So when you come to the likes of chapter 15 here in Luke, you're asking yourself, what's the key verse to this chapter? Because obviously the parable's in it. The first one's the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin, very closely related to the parable of the lost son, the prodigal son.

What's the key verse to an understanding of the chapter? And the key verse is actually verse 2. Verse 2, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

[1 : 12] Tax collectors, sinners, we're all drawing near to him. Sinners is a general word for all kinds of people the Pharisees looked down upon, people whose lives were not necessarily at all good, but nevertheless, they were coming to Jesus, they were being saved, they were coming into the kingdom of God.

And the Pharisees grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. When you come to verses 20 to 24, you can see that that really is the key to the chapter, because there you find Jesus represented in the Father as one who receives.

Those who strayed from him, those who came back to him, and welcomed them back into his own fellowship. In other words, the Father figure in the parable is in fact representative of Jesus.

It's not representative of God the Father, though there's nothing wrong with seeing God the Father as receiving us when we come with our confession of sin.

But it is in the context, as you take the key verse to be verse 2, then the Father figure in the parable of the prodigal is in fact Jesus himself.

[2 : 27] This is the problem with the scribes and the Pharisees. It's not that they don't know anything about God. That's why they were presented by the elder son in the final part of the chapter, which we didn't read.

The Pharisees, the scribes, they refused to go into the kingdom. They refused to accept Jesus, though they had been brought up, if you like, by God through the teaching of the scriptures all the way through the Old Testament years and into the time that Jesus is now living and speaking to them here in these gospels.

They were not prepared to come in. They were not prepared to accept Christ. They had all this teaching in their background, but they refused to accept him. They would not come to him. But the people that they looked down on were coming.

Tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, people that you wouldn't expect to be welcomed by God. But that's the nature of grace. They were coming, they were being saved.

And the prodigal son is a representation of them. That's what we're looking at today. First of all, we'll look in these verses at freedom, which imprisons, verses 11 to 16, and then verses 16 to 20, a servitude which sets free.

[3 : 50] And I'm deliberately using that language because, as we'll see, the younger son thought he was heading for freedom from his father's house, from the restrictions he had there perhaps, from the things that he was no longer happy with.

So off he went. But he discovered that what he thought was freedom was in fact bondage. It was slavery. And in the second part of the study this morning, there's a servitude which sets free.

When you come to be a servant of Christ, when you come to be back to him, back to God, back to Jesus, and you give your life to him, to be controlled by him, to be ruled by him, many of those people out there in the world today would say, well, that's slavery, that's bondage, that's restriction.

Whereas this is teaching us it's the opposite. It's a servitude which sets you free. Sets you free from what you once thought was freedom.

Freedom which imprisons. Now as you read down through the first part of the passage here, verses 11 to 13, you can see there the young son, the younger of them, he said to his father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

[5 : 05] So the father divided his property between them. That was unusual. That was actually very ungrateful. That was an affront to his father. He couldn't wait till his father died to get this share of the property.

He wanted it there and then so that he could take it away and leave home and go and enjoy what he thought was his freedom. So, in other words, it represents wanting to go our own way, wanting to actually have our own mindset and our own idea of what is freedom and what is right and what is wrong.

And that, of course, takes you back, really, to the fall of man described in Genesis chapter 3. And as you read the likes of this passage, it shows you that this is the legacy of sin.

This is the legacy of the fall. This is the legacy that now is part of every single one of us. That's what we are by nature and ourselves. We want away from God. We don't want to be too near from God.

What Adam did is really what we do effectively in our lives till we come to know better, till we come, as this young man came to himself in verse 17. Adam sought to hide himself from God.

[6 : 10] That is part of the condition of fallenness, of sinfulness. And here is what this young man is actually doing in the parable. He's saying, Father, I want everything that belongs to me.

Give it to me now. And so his father divided this to him, the portion of it that belonged to him. And off he went with it. He gathered it all and took his journey into a far country.

And that's what's represented by the far country. Putting a distance between ourselves and God. And imagining that being away from God is actually freedom.

That is far better for us as human beings to follow our own inclinations. to make something of life ourselves. To do it with God perhaps in the background but not really very close to us.

And when we get so close to God as we do sometimes in the gospel, we're really not ourselves natively or in our hearts prepared to come all that near to him.

[7 : 17] We think that it's best for us to stay a measured distance from him. Or sometimes even as far away as possible. And we look, you remember at Proverbs 29 verse 8 last Wednesday evening.

Where we find that what that verse says, although it's sometimes misused, can be translated in a way that gives the wrong impression at least. Where there is no vision, the people perish.

We see that what that means is where there is no revelation, where the word of God is removed from public life. Where the word of God is absent. Where its influence is not felt.

What happens? People throw off restraint. People follow their own inclinations. People want to go into the far country as far as possible because they imagine God is not there.

That's the drive behind taking the Bible out of our schools. Taking the Bible out of public life. Taking the Bible out of councils. That's what's behind the idea that somehow if you're a Christian, you can't actually be a representative of boards or trusts or public bodies of any kind because it's not right to use your Christian influence in any of these public bodies because that's not equality.

[8 : 32] That's not right. That's not fair. The idea behind that is just the same idea as this young man represents. Get as far away from God as possible. Put God out of things as much as possible.

Don't let God influence the way you think. And don't let God especially come into public life because that's the last thing that really is advisable as far as people are concerned.

But then that's not freedom. And this young man found out that wasn't freedom. Freedom in the definition of the Bible is not you and I as human beings being left to do what we want.

Being free to do what we think is best. Being free to actually live our lives totally without God and being free to have God not represented in any other aspect of life apart from our own personal private lives.

That's not freedom. Freedom is not the liberty to do as you want to do. Freedom according to the Bible is to do as you ought to do.

[9 : 41] And to do as you ought to do requires absolutes. Requires a standard other than the one we make up for ourselves.

And that standard can only be the standard that God sets us. The standard of His Word. The standard of His truth. Pontius Pilate was examining Jesus.

Jesus said to him that he had come to bear witness to the truth. and Pilate with that great question which he really probably didn't know much about said what is truth?

But he didn't wait to find out what the answer was. He turned around and he walked out. And a lot of people actually have the question in their mind what is truth?

But if you actually then start suggesting that somehow truth begins with what you find in the Bible they turn on their heel and they walk away and say no I'm not prepared to accept that. Truth is what I make of it.

[10 : 43] Truth is my personal opinion of it. Freedom is the liberty to live as I want. No God is saying that's not at all what freedom is. Freedom is to live as you ought.

And what this man found and what this man represents is that going away from God is the last thing anybody wants anybody really should do. That's the problem as we said with the Pharisees and the scribes.

They were brought up to know about God but they didn't want Christ. Maybe there's someone here today who's been brought up to know about God who knows a lot about God but is not yet prepared to come to Jesus to give their life to Christ to be ruled by the will of Christ rather than their own will.

If so then you're represented by this young man. What he thought was freedom turned out to be bondage.

See what it says when he came to this place this far country away from home he squandered his property in reckless living.

[12 : 09] When he had spent everything a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. He wasted his life. See a life without God is a wasted life.

It's a tragic life. Not only did he squander his property in reckless living but when all of that had run out and when it should have been obvious to him well I really ought to go home now.

I really ought to go back to my father because I know that there's something in my father's house that I can have. At least there's warmth. At least there's food. Even the servants there have food. What does he do?

He goes and hires himself to a citizen of that country and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything.

You know nothing could be more offensive to the Pharisees than to talk about pigs, swine, these dirty animals. And actually that's what Jesus is doing.

[13 : 16] He's saying to them this young man, this person who was feeding pigs and was not even able to get any of the food that the pigs were eating. He's the one that God received, that Jesus received back into fellowship with himself.

Leave that for the moment. Just imagine what this represents. Just think about this. A wasted life, verse 13, he squandered his property and reckless living and then he joined himself to a citizen of that country.

You see, our natural thinking if we're still committed to going away from God, even when things don't go our way, our first thought is not to get back to God.

It's actually to take further steps away from him. And that's what this man did. Instead of going back to his father's house, he went and joined himself to this person and it led him further away from his father's house than ever before.

That's really what represents a life without God. You may think today, and I may think today, well that's not me. I'm not that far away from God.

[14 : 34] You may think that doesn't represent me, surely. I find that quite offensive. You might think, if you think that's really what I'm like, that I'm squandering my life in reckless living. I haven't really abused my life.

I haven't actually been excessive in my life and I haven't really come to say I'm absolutely committed not to go back to God. Well that's fine, but are you still living without Christ?

If so, you're in the far country. It's not just the life that looks outwardly disrespectful, disrespectful or not respectable.

that's far from God. Probably most of the people in their own community today who are furthest from God are people who are well off.

People who are well thought of in society. But who live without Christ. Whatever kind of life we have, friends, and whatever stage of life we've reached, living without Christ is a wasted life.

[15 : 46] It's squandering away life. It's a life that ought to be lived in obedience to Christ and in honor of God.

And the further we're away from Him, and the longer we stay away from Him, the more we are actually not fulfilling our chief end to glorify Him.

It's a freedom which imprisons. Don't listen to that voice in your head, in your heart, or out there in the world that says to you, you don't have to go back to Jesus.

You don't have to be that fully committed to God. Just take it easy. Be respectful. Well, as we'll see, being respectful is fine, but it's not enough.

Because secondly, you find a servitude which sets free. When you come here to verse 16, you're really beginning to see something changing. He was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave Him anything.

[16 : 48] And then verse 17, when He came to Himself, that's the turning point. When He came to Himself, that's the beginning of the rest of His life. That's the beginning of a life that changed from that moment completely.

He came to Himself. And when He came to Himself, and verses 17 to 20 describes that, it's a superb illustration for us of what repentance is.

Repentance, not a nice word to people who don't want their lives changed. When you talk about repentance, even to some parts of the church today, you're like something out of the Victorian age.

Because repentance is something that makes demands of us. Repentance is something that calls upon us to be different to what we are and what we were born as.

Repentance is something that makes us face up to what we are as God describes us, and come to God with a confession of our sin, to seek His forgiveness, to start a new life.

[17 : 48] Repentance, in fact, is, by the grace of God, something we come to possess and to act in our lives.

And there's three things within this servitude which sets free that describes repentance for us. I'm briefly going to go through these. First is realization, the second one is resolution, the third one is return.

There's a realization in repentance. This man came to himself. He realized the truth of his situation. everything was fine up to now, although that started to go wrong long before this.

But it's now that he came to himself, and he came to realize the truth about himself and the truth too about his father's house, because he realized what things were really like at home compared to where he was.

He realized that back home he would have warmth, he would have security, he would have plenty food to eat, even the servants there had plenty food to eat. That's what happens when God opens your mind to the reality of the situation.

[18 : 57] When God opens your mind to accept the Bible's description of ourselves, that's really a large part of what this realization is about. God does that.

Then you realize what you really lack. You realize you don't have the most important thing of all. That you don't have Jesus, that you don't have salvation, that you don't have that relationship with God where he's your father and he's pleased to treat you as his son.

And you realize that your present state as a lost sinner is so, so opposite to what it should be and could be.

What it's like back in the father's house. A realization of where he's at, of his real situation, of what things are like back home, a realization of the truth, that up to then he had not accepted.

Secondly, there's a resolution. And there are two parts to that resolution. There's a resolution to go back home, and there's a resolution to confess his sin when he does so.

[20 : 17] See what he's saying? He's resolving. He's got a resolution now that he's come to this realization. He is saying, 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 more longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. It comes to a decision. And sometimes in evangelical or reformed or Calvinistic circles, we've not really been very friendly with the term decision, because it is misused.

Because coming to be a Christian, coming to be saved is more than just deciding for yourself to do so. It's a decision that comes about because God is working in your life. It's a decision that comes about because you come to realize your situation through the grace of God, through the spirit of God working in you.

But there is a decision. He decided here, he resolved to go back home. And it's very, very interesting, isn't it, that he realizes in what he says, what he says shows that in his realization, he also knew that he had offended his father deeply.

And yet he's not afraid to go back home. Now that's a wonderful point. Because when you come to confess your sin, when you come to repent of your sin, you come to realize that our sin really is an offense to God, that we have offended God, that we have treated him disrespectfully.

[21 : 45] But instead of being afraid to go back to him, we're afraid now of staying away from him. We're afraid of the consequences of staying in the far country, where once we were afraid to face up to reality and go back to God.

And you see his longing to leave home has been replaced now by a longing to get back. he was longing to leave home.

He left home prematurely. He wanted all the stuff that his father had to give him so that he could just get away from that place, so that he could go and enjoy what he thought was his freedom, which turned out to be bondage.

But now you see he's in a different situation, he's of a different mindset. He has come to himself. He's had a whole turnaround in his mind. And in that turnaround that's taken place in his mind, in his soul, he's now longing to get back home, to get back where he should be.

And the resolution also includes, along with a longing to go back home, it includes a confession of his sin. I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, father I have sinned against heaven and before you.

[23 : 09] God, going back to Jesus, going back to God, going back as represented in his younger son, is far more than just going back as if it's just feeling sorry for himself and he wants to be rehabilitated but just do it on his own terms.

None of that is there. All of that is gone. It's an unreserved confession. He's saying, I have offended you, I've sinned against God, I've sinned against in your presence, against heaven, against God and before you.

You see, repentance is not feeling sorry for ourselves. That might be part of regret, but it's not repentance. This young man did not go back home because he was feeling sorry for himself.

He didn't go back home not even because where he was was very painful for him in the far country. He didn't just get back home to get rid of his hunger. He wanted to go back home to confess his wrong to his father.

He wanted to start again. He wanted to say, Lord or Father, I've gone wrong. I know what I've done and I want to put it right.

[24 : 31] I've dishonored you. I've sinned. And I want to make a new start. And as he comes, he comes to confess something else.

Not only that he's done wrong, but he confesses his unworthiness of being received back. See what he's saying? Ah, 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. That is a superb insight into a penitent heart.

Because a penitent heart comes before God and says, Lord, I've sinned against you. I've dishonored your name. I'm not worthy that you should receive me back. And certainly not to the status of sonship, certainly not status of family, certainly not to be called a friend of yours anymore.

But if you receive me back, I'll be happy even with being your servant. That's what he's saying. Because he realizes that he's unworthy of receiving any status from his father again.

[25 : 47] That's what we do when we come to confess our sin. We come to repent. We don't come back to God and say, well, I'm sorry, Lord, but I know that you are forgiving, so please take me back into your fellowship.

Maybe there's an element of that in it. Of course there is. But it's much deeper than that. It comes to God and says, I'm unworthy that you should receive me back, but please take me back.

Even if it's just the lowest place in your house, as long as I'm in your house, that will do me. That's what's taught. This humility, this unworthiness, this confession of unworthiness, nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling.

The words of the hymn writer really express as we come to God empty handed. No merits of our own, no worthiness of our own. But you see, the great thing about this, as it preaches the gospel to us, as it tells us about God's reception of sinners back to himself, Christ Jesus welcoming them as we see this evening.

The great thing about this is, you come with your confession of unworthiness, but God points you to the one who is worthy, for whose sake you are accepted back. Yes, you come and say, Lord, I've sinned against you, and I've sinned and I've treated you terribly and shamefully, and I'm not worthy to be called anymore one of your family.

[27 : 33] God says, but I have my son, and he's worthy that I should receive you back, and for his sake, I forgive you, I welcome you, I'm going to treat you, and put you in the status of sonship.

The realization and the resolution. But there's a third one, the return. And you know, in many ways, that's the most important of the three.

You wouldn't have it without the other two, I'm sure. When it's genuine repentance, you have the three, the realization of what your situation is, the resolution to go back home to God and confess your sins in doing so.

But there's the actual return. I will arise and go to my father. Then, verse 20, and he arose and came to his father. Because there might be a situation where people have reached a realization of what the Bible is actually saying, and a resolution that it would be best for them to go back to God, but they never come back.

They never actually make their way back to Jesus. He arose and came. Because our resolution to go back to God may very well be in your own heart today, and yet you may not have gone back to him.

[29 : 07] You may know it's a very good idea, it's something you'd want to do, something you want to do before you die. Well, what's the point if you die before you do it?

Do it now. Go back to him. Return.

That's what this young man represents. He arose and came to his father. See, he has now come to love the idea of being back home.

And so he returns. He can't stay away anymore. He's not prepared to go on any longer where he was, or even on the way back. He wants to actually get there and be with his father, so he arose and came to his father.

His independent lifestyle is behind him. His idea of freedom is no longer relevant. He's done with that. He's learned.

[30 : 11] It's actually bondage. Where are you today? you come to Jesus. Are you still staying away from him?

Well, God wants more than a resolution. He wants more than a reformation. It's not enough that you and I tidy up our life a wee bit ourselves, and then come back and think that's going to do for God.

It has to be a revolution, a turnaround, a coming back, a return. He arose and came to his father. Have you gone back to God?

Are you struggling with the idea of what it means to go back to Christ, for Christ to rule your life? there may very well be a struggle in that.

Struggle in your mind, what's that going to mean for me? What's it going to mean for people I know? well, take the struggle with you.

[31 : 31] Just take it to Jesus. Put it at his feet and say, this is where I am, Lord. Take me back, please. It's where I want to be.

Long ago, when God was speaking to Israel through the prophet Hosea, Hosea and his marriage is a brilliant book, and I can hardly do it just as even by referring to it at all, but it's a brilliant book because it represents how the people of Israel are represented in Hosea's own marriage.

His wife left him. She went to live with someone else. He was commanded by God to go and take her back again. That was a representation, an image, if you like, of God's relationship with Israel.

Israel had departed from God. She had left God. She had gone to live with the idols of Canaan, the religion of Canaan, the Baals.

And in chapter 2 describes how God, if you like, brought her into the far country, into the wilderness, where she came to a realization of what she lacked and how the situation she had just was to go.

[32 : 56] And in Hosea 2, verse 7, which are very applicable just to close our study today of the prodigal, or this part of it at least. What did Israel say there? Hosea 2, verse 7, I will now go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.

Say that of yourself today if you haven't gone back to Christ. I will go back because I know it's better there than where I am now.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the gospel, because through the gospel you call on us to return to you.

We thank you for all who have already returned. We pray that you would keep them close to yourself. Help us, Lord, not to wander away from you, even though we know that when you take us back, we will never actually again return to the far country.

be pleased, we pray, to draw those today who still are strangers to you and are in the far country. Be pleased to draw those who may be approaching the borders of your kingdom and have not yet come in.

[34 : 17] Lord, we pray that you would draw them and show them your mercy, your willingness to receive them and to welcome them. Grant us these things, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's conclude now our worship today singing Psalm 103, in the Sing Psalms version, Psalm 103, and from verse 8, that's on page 135, we'll sing verses 8 to 14.

The Lord is merciful and kind, to anger slow and full of grace. He will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face. He does not punish our misdeeds or give our sins their just reward.

How great is love, as high as heaven, toward all those who fear the Lord. Verses 8 to 14 in conclusion. Amen. the Lord is merciful and kind, to anger slow and full of grace.

He will not constantly reprove, who or in his anger hide his face.

[35 : 42] He does not punish our misdeeds or give our sins a justly word.

How great is love, as high as heaven, as far as he stays on the way, so far is love us born away, our many sins and trespasses and all the guilt that God has played.

Just as a father loves his child, so God loves Joseph, he has known, for he remembers we are dust, and well he knows our people frame, and well he knows our people frame.

I'll go to the main door after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen. Amen.