

You cannot lose what Jesus has given you

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[0 : 00] Make your way with me to Luke 15 and then to Romans 11. We'll begin in Luke 15, Luke chapter 15, beginning at verse 14. As you're making your way there, let me say I'm not beginning at the beginning of the parable of Luke 15, which is the parable. It's not three parables, it's one parable.

And Jesus, if you remember, speaks of a lost sheep and a lost coin, the lost sheep being lost away from home, the lost coin being lost at home. And then, of course, when you get to the two brothers, you are meant to see the youngest brother being lost away from home and the older brother being lost at home.

Jesus sets the parable up for you. Now, because you know the parable fairly well, we're going to pick it up with what goes through the younger brother's mind in Luke 14 as his thoughts begin to turn again to the father. So, verse 14 of Luke 15.

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 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.

I will arise and go to my father. I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. Romans 11 and verse 11.

[2 : 09] As you're making your way there, Paul has explained the gospel. Now, he's on about Israel's part in the great scheme. And this is what he says in verse 11 of chapter 11.

So, I ask you, did they, meaning Israel, the Jewish people, God's people, stumble in order that they might fall? By no means. Rather, through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now, if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean? Now, I'm speaking to you, Gentiles. Inasmuch then, as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. Well, may God bless his word to us this evening.

I'm going to make it really simple. Tares can become wheat. Unbelievers can become believers by the grace of God. But this evening is not so much about conversion as it is about children of God who are wandering in the world who then turn back to God. And this, you could call it, is the theology of psychology. Because the two passages that I've read out contain so much psychology. Now, you ought not to be afraid of psychology and thinking that it's some kind of secular endeavor. There's nothing wrong with psychology as long as it is framed with a biblical understanding, because even Christians have minds that are prone to wander. So, what is the biblical psychology of a believer going adrift?

Why does it happen, and why do they return? And I think you'll see in our readings that it's quite surprising what God actually uses to turn a person around. So, in the doctrine that we've been looking at, which is the perseverance of the saints, we have admitted or we have seen that it is possible for a real, genuine, faithful believer who most definitely saved to fall into sin.

It does happen. But they will always return. Because they are genuine. Because they have been saved.

[5 : 16] Because they have been redeemed. Because they have been sealed with the Spirit of God, they will always return. But there is one thing I'm not going to be able to answer for you this evening, and that is time. What is the time frame of a son or a daughter drifting before they then return? And the answer is, I don't know. I just don't know. The point here, however, is to prove that what God accomplished in salvation in salvation in Jesus, in that He saved us and gave us eternal life, that this cannot be lost by a believer. We cannot lose what Jesus has given to us. Okay, does that make sense? We cannot lose what Jesus has given to us. And so, by the very fact that believers, or shall we say, sons that forsake the faith and disappear and disappear and then come back to the faith, maybe five years down the line or later than that, is only proof positive of the perseverance of the saints, that God's salvation cannot be lost. It proves the point that the gift of eternal life and a gift of eternal security is proved in the fact that believers return to the Lord. So, this is super encouraging, that while it is disappointing and discouraging and in many ways that we see loved ones who once know and love the Lord to appear not to be doing that anymore, they return, because that's what the perseverance of the faith teaches us, because you cannot lose what God has given you. But that raises an important question of why why do they even fall into sin in the first place? Why do they deny Jesus? Why do they begin to love the world? Or to put it another way, what actually goes on in their mind and in their heart that causes them to turn away from God? And then, and then causes them to return to God. So, what I want to bring to you is the theology of psychology, the psychology of someone who drifts from God. And the reason it's important is because whatever controls the mind controls the person. Whatever gets your mind gets you for the day.

This is why we're told to fix our thoughts on things above, because whatever gets our mind gets us. We're controlled. We don't control our thoughts. It's quite the opposite. We don't control our heart.

Our heart grabs us. That's why God gives us a new one. So, it's that way around, not the other way around. So, when believers are adrift from God, they have denied, they have walked out the church, they are somewhere in the world because they love the world, they are not around to hear the Word of God. And if they're not around to hear the Word of God, they can't be directed by it. They can't be called to repentance. They're not having any form of spiritual input in that way whatsoever. And you've got to remember what Paul said. Paul never got tired of reminding Christians. I, because I'm more sinful than Paul, I'm assuming, I'm constantly saying, man, I've told you once, I've told you, I really have to tell you again. How many times? In fact, I listened to two pastors who were towards the end of their ministry and both said that there's two things that shot them, the waste of time, how much time they wasted in ministry. And these are men who are sort of, you know, well-seasoned ministers who are still ministering in their 70s. And they said, even now, it's a battle. And the other thing was, it shocked us how much we had to remind people of the gospel.

Paul said this, and I'll paraphrase, I repeat God's Word to you because it keeps you safe. That's why Paul used repetition. It keeps you safe. You have to be told the same things over and over and over again. So, this message has two parts, the leaving part and the returning part. In the same way, if you're a son, you're brought up in the faith, you're a daughter, you're brought up, you love the world, you then leave. But then something happens in the world which then causes you to return. So, there's a leaving part and there is a returning part, just like the younger brother.

There is a leaving part and then there is a returning part after a period of time. Well, in Hebrews 3, we learn that one of the things that Christians have to battle against is the deceitfulness of sin. That this is the very thing that causes believers to turn their back on Jesus. They have become deceived. They're not thinking straight. We see this in Luke, we see it in Romans, that they're not thinking straight. We see it in Hebrews. And the reason people can't see it is because they have been deceived by the deceitfulness of sin, so they cannot see the deceitfulness. Other people can see it, but they have begun to think that the grass is greener on the other side. Sin just messes everything up really badly. So, here's the first part, the psychology of turning away, or rather why this younger son leaves. So, I'm going to begin with a question. People who leave the faith, people who go adrift, people who stop following, they do it because they make a decision to do it. But is it a good decision?

[11 : 18] Well, I don't think it's a good decision at all. But they will think it is. They will think that they are finally thinking clearly, that they have somehow come to their senses. The trouble is, because of the deceitfulness of sin, that is the very thing that hasn't happened. They're not thinking clearly, but they are thinking foolishly. When a person who follows Jesus, who stops and thinks, well, I'm not going to do this anymore, doesn't realize that even raising the question in their own heart is because they have become deceived by sin. In other words, they've become so unaware of their spiritual battle that they think that the question itself is a good question, and they know the answer to it. They'll often claim that the decision that they have made to turn away, to stop following, to do other things, is the right decision for them. But of course it is, because sin is selfish.

It's always going to be the right decision for them, because they're not thinking about anybody else. But as we have seen, persevering in the faith, if you remember our passage in Hebrews, is a community endeavor. It is a congregational endeavor. We are to persevere with one another.

Sin, the deceitfulness of sin, goes one step further than that, in that it causes a believer to think that he's thinking clearly when he's actually thinking foolishly. So you read the nature of sin in Romans 1, one of the clear characteristics of being under the influence of sin is that you claim to be wise, but you have actually become a fool.

So when that psychological change begins to happen in the mind of someone who is about to go adrift and stop following him and begins to love the Lord, that's what's causing it. The deceitfulness of sin is raising those questions and giving foolish answers as though they were wise answers. And the people themselves cannot see it because sin, by its very nature, is deceitful. Okay, it doesn't tell you the truth. It doesn't say, here's the truth, make up your own mind. It tells you a pack of lies and then lead you down a path of destruction. But all of this can be summed up with a familiar phrase, which is, everyone begins to think who's in this position that the grass is somehow greener on the other side.

I've struggled with that phrase every, not the first time I heard it, but when I was studying theology, because I don't think it's entirely true. And I don't think it's true for this simple reason.

[14 : 15] That if the grass was greener on the other side, then everyone would be in the same place. Right? If the grass is greener in a particular place out there, everyone would be there.

The trouble is, everyone isn't there. So the issue is not that there's any greener grass out there. The issue, the real issue going on in a person's heart is that that is greener than this. And everyone thinks the same until they're in that place for a period of time and then think, no, it's actually greener over there. And so you have this continual moving around because the grass is always greener in comparison to where you are, which raises one very important issue. And that is, you have lost the appreciation of what you have.

For a person to turn away from Jesus means that they've never looked down to see just how green the grass is. That they have somehow been deceived that the grass is greener out there. In other words, the issue that's happening is not that they've got their eyes on the world, is that they haven't got their eyes on Jesus.

They haven't noticed what they really have in God. They haven't fully appreciated their hearts have not been so captured by God and His greatness.

They haven't visualized it. Their heart is not invested in it. They do not see for a moment what they have and so over there it looks better.

[15 : 56] But it only looks better because you have not seen and captured by what you have in Jesus. That's the issue. The issue is not that it somehow looks pretty over there.

The issue is you don't actually see what you've got yourself. So secondly, if this is true, then we have to begin to understand how God deals with a person like that.

And He uses a thing, or we can call it, providence. And what providence means is God's continual care or special care for His people.

It works away so that it brings these people who have gone adrift by the deceitfulness of sin back to their senses. God has to bring men and women, boys and girls, back to their senses.

And when you can't reason with a person to get them back to their senses, you have to do something else. We've got to remember that God is the best psychologist, that God is the best heart surgeon, that He knows us better than we know ourselves.

[17 : 11] So just look with me in Luke 15, what actually goes on in the mind and heart of the younger brother as he begins to return to the Father.

Verse 14, He began to be in need. Well, if He wasn't in need, would it have led to the rest? No. He'd still be enjoying the high life.

The trouble was, it took a certain amount of time for the money to run out. Okay? But then He began to be in need. It was a circumstantial change.

And as His circumstances changed, He began to think a little bit differently. Verse 16, He long, longed to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate.

Now, for a young Jewish boy, that really is the definition of a recession, isn't it? Like, thinking of pigs being the unclean animal which Jews have not led to. I mean, so you're getting the picture of just how low, okay, He runs out of money.

[18 : 13] Now He runs out of food. He is in need. And no one, this is important, no one gave Him anything. Not like His Father who gave Him everything in the home and then plenty to go.

No one gave Him anything. Then, verse 17, not through a sermon, not necessarily through a spiritual conviction it would appear, but through circumstantial change in His life, verse 17, He came to Himself.

In other words, at that point, He began to come to His senses. And He said, How many of my Father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger?

What's He doing? Well, He's making a comparison because He can make a comparison. In other words, He suddenly began to realize exactly what He had back with the Father, that He hasn't got out here.

Now He begins to see where the greener grass really is. But here we have a person who doesn't seem to have heard a sermon.

[19 : 28] He simply changes his mind, or his mind is beginning to change and his heart is beginning to change because of circumstantial changes in his life.

He's run out of money. Okay? He doesn't have a job, so he has to go get a job. And the only job that he can get is to feed pigs, which is bad enough. But then, he's so hungry, he wants to be fed with the pigs' food, but obviously the employers that he's under won't even let him have any of that.

I mean, this is... One of the things we need to notice at this point is what is actually going on in this person's life that causes him to think again about the Father.

You'll notice that none of his motives are pure or honest or lovely. He doesn't think, first, I've really sinned against my Father.

He doesn't think, I really love my Father. He doesn't even say, I really miss my Father. What he says is, I'm hungry, and my Father feeds servants, and I'm a son. Don't ever think that when people come to the faith or come back to the faith, it is because they are at first repentant.

[20 : 42] There's many people who are brought to Jesus who want to be healed, who then get their sins forgiven. I didn't come here for that. No, I don't know. I understand you didn't come to have your sins forgiven, but that's what you need.

And there's many people who return back to the faith at a circumstantial difficulty and not because they're repentant. Repentance will come. It will come, but you can be sure that this other stuff will precede it.

He comes to his senses through circumstantial change. In other words, what I'm trying to show you is that when God has a son or a daughter and they go adrift in the world, God is never going to make it easy for them.

Never going to make it easy. He'll sustain them because they are his, but he's never going to satisfy them in the wilderness. He's never going to give them what they want. Their plans are never going to come to fruition.

Their desires to stay longer in the world are never going to be prayers that are going to be answered. God's going to use his providence, misery, struggling, being in need, in getting people to come to their senses, in bringing them back to the faith.

[22 : 06] Because, in sin, we're not capable of making a good decision without God. We're just not capable of it. And so God uses a whole load of means to cause people who are not thinking wisely, but foolishly, to come to their senses.

Jonathan Edwards says this, that God first has to leave man long enough in his misery that he becomes sensible of it. Then, he brings him home.

So, one of God's providences is misery, is suffering, is being in need, is circumstantial difficulty.

Because you're his, God will use whatever he chooses to you to get you home. You'll notice then in Romans 11, something else, and this is where I want you to pay special attention.

People who don't have a close relationship with God, but know God, are very jealous of people who do have a close relationship with God. Romans 11. Israel knew the blessings of God.

[23 : 21] God was theirs. He was their God. They were the first people of God, but they turned away. They went to idols. They went to self-gratifying acts. And God's design of salvation is so marvelous that in verse 11 and verse 14, we learn that Israel's rebellion and rejection of God led to the engrafting of Gentiles into the faith.

And as they are grafted in and now enjoying the blessings of God, God uses this to make his very people jealous. Now, who of you thought that God does something like that?

Who of you thought, really thought, that that's the type of thing that God gets up to? But that's how God works. Yes, he makes his word clear. Yes, he does work by his spirit.

But here, he makes his people jealous. The people who were not enjoying God's blessings are now enjoying God's blessings in Israel. Like, well, hang on a minute. They used to be for us.

And that jealousy is, God belongs to us. And that stirs up, and that's what Paul hopes will save some. It's not a sermon.

[24 : 38] It's not an ultimate conviction, as we see. It's jealousy. God will make someone who knew him, who's now far from him, jealous to bring him or her home.

See, people are quite complicated. But they're not so complicated that you can understand what God gets up to. But that's how God works. Israel begins to see the blessings that were once theirs now being enjoyed by somebody else, and they become jealous in order that some might be saved.

In other words, to put it in simple English, when you've enjoyed the garden and you're thrown out of the garden, you will miss the garden. Adam and Eve knew what they missed.

Israel knew the blessings of God. They had the blessings of God. They rejected God. And now they're beginning to see exactly what they are missing. It's a point of comparison.

Just like the younger brother, how many of my hired servants in my father's house have this. He's able to compare because he knows really, deep down in his heart, what the father is really like.

[25 : 56] So never, ever be surprised at the type of things that God uses to bring people back to him. I actually thought that when one of my brothers had difficulties within business, and it was a big difficulty to the point where you're going to have to start selling a lot of things, and he did, that I thought, this could be a real turning point.

And it was for a brief moment. But then his life went back into prosperity, so much so he's, you know, effectively a managing director of a company that turns over £40 million a year.

You know, his life's good. And I'm not adverse to praying that God would take it all away from him to bring him home. It is horrible to see when our loved ones go through hard times.

But if it gets them back to the father, I really don't care. What I care about is that they come home. And so I begin to understand the type of things that God uses.

And I begin to understand just how long it takes for the blessings to run out, for the money to run out, for the good times to run out. But when they do, it's at that point that people begin to come to their senses.

[27 : 23] Let me conclude. If you were to go away this evening and read Proverbs and Psalms and even the Sermon of the Mount, you'll begin to understand that yes, it is true that people are different in many ways, but they're also the same in many ways.

We have the same needs because God is our need. Every person is not a master, they are mastered by something else, but they can only serve one master at a time.

Jesus said that. Either me or mammon. You cannot serve two masters. It's impossible. So whatever controls your heart will control your thoughts, will control your will, will control your actions, will control what you desire and what you want to do because our heart will always be found in the place of our greatest treasure.

treasure. Wherever you're, okay, if you ask Jesus, where do you find a person's heart? Well, where's their treasure? For where your treasure will be, that is where your heart will be also.

So we're back to noticing the greener grass beneath our own feet as we stand here with Jesus. So wherever your heart is, guess what? You're following it.

[28 : 34] You're following it. And so unless a person's heart is so captured by the love of God that it is so captured by the greatness of Jesus, they're not going to be staying with him. They're going to be wandering elsewhere.

But it's easy to see as we look at Jesus that we're not directed so much by words, though we need to be, as much as we are by what we love, by what we value, by what we fear, by what we hope for, by what we desire.

These are the driving forces of our life. These are the things that actually direct us to the left and to the right. These are the things that can take us away from Jesus, but also the things that can bring us back to Jesus without our motives ever being pure or honest or even godly.

God will take care of that at a later point. He doesn't try and do everything at once like you and I. This is why so many believers drift in their faith and why so many others don't grow in their faith because their hearts are not fully captured by Jesus.

They're captured just enough not to go wandering, but they're not captured so much so as that they can grow in the faith. The trouble is is that though they belong to Jesus, they don't listen to him and that's the danger.

[29 : 57] When you don't listen to him, you'll wander because it's the word of God that keeps our heart right. And then you have the problem of people believing the right things, but then when you ask them why do you believe it, they go, I'm not sure.

That's a dangerous position to be in. We're to know our faith, we're to hold fast to the confession that we have received. It doesn't mean that we're all to be theologians, but it does mean we have to be certain about the Jesus that we believe in.

When believers get themselves in a position of not listening to God's word, as I said, they begin to get themselves into trouble, they begin to drift. And God will use misery, jealousy, circumstances, debt, bankruptcy, anything that he likes to get you back where he wants you.

That's providence. Providence is God's special care of you. But it doesn't always come in the form of a sermon. It can come in the form of debt.

It can come in the form of bankruptcy. It can come in the form of illness. It can come in the form of pain. It can come in the form of loss.

[31 : 19] God is speaking to you at that point that you may come to your senses. So true believers can never, ever, ever be lost eternally. But they can be foolish.

They can be really foolish. But they cannot be lost. And God does whatever he does to get you home. Listen to the son. 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.

Listen to the actions of the father. He saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and hissed him.

God is more concerned about getting you home than getting you right at first. Amen.

Amen.