

# ***THE GREATEST STORIES EVER TOLD: PARABLES OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE***

## ***Week Six: The Two Lost Sons***

**Hannaford Street Bible Church**

**December 6, 2020**

**Class Notes**

### **Our Purpose together will be to:**

- Instill a love and excitement for studying and learning the Word of God.
- Increase our trust in the reliability of Scripture, specifically the Gospel of Luke
- Understand and use the Six Steps for studying a parable and be able to apply those steps of interpretation to other relevant biblical passages.
- Learn a basic understanding of Hebrew poetry and be able to recognize it in other biblical passages.
- Understand some of Jesus' theology from his parables.
- Apply the parables we study to our lives.

## **I. PART ONE: THE YOUNGER SON**

***Luke 15:11-24:*** *Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.*

*"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. "*

*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "*

*The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "*

*But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's*

*have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."*

**A. Step One: Setting** - The same as *The Lost Sheep & The Lost Coin*: the grumbling of the Pharisees over Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners.

**B. Step Two: Original Audience** - The same as *The Lost Sheep & The Lost Coin*: the Pharisees.

### **C. Step Three: Literary Structure –**

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. **(a son lost)**

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **(goods wasted in expensive living)**

After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **(everything lost)**

So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **(the great sin - feeding pigs for Gentiles)**

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. **(total rejection)**

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **(a change of mind)**

I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' **(an initial repentance)**

So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (**total acceptance**)

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (**the great repentance**)

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (**everything gained**)

Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. (**goods used in joyful celebration**)

For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. (**a son found**)

#### **Notes:**

1. The parable is about "*a man who had two sons.*" What we normally call the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*, is only the first part of the parable. We need to see the parable as a whole.
2. Remember the Pharisees' process for repentance. First, one must confess one's sins. Second, one must demonstrate one's sincerity in seeking repentance. Third, one must make restitution for the damage caused by one's sin. Only by doing all three things can one repent and be forgiven. Jesus speaks directly to the issue of the Pharisees' repentance in the first part of the parable.

#### **D. Step Four: Cultural Background –**

1. The relationship of the two sons to their father and to each other is broken.
2. The younger son wishes his father dead. He does not want the responsibility of the family, only the money that will be his. He is rebellious. He breaks his father's heart.
3. The younger son demands both possession and disposition of the estate. By doing so when his father is alive, he states clearly he wants his father dead.
4. The older son does not act as a go between, he does not beg his younger brother to stay. This is his role as the eldest son, but he refuses. His relationship with his brother is broken, as is the younger son's with the father.

5. The father does what no one would do, he grants his young son's request. The village would have expected him to beat his younger son into submission. The insult he has suffered is enough to cause the father to move to another village because of the shame.
6. He allows his son the freedom to reject him. Only in this way can he hope to ever regain a son by being rejected himself. He wants a son who will obey him out of love not out of fear and duty. This would be the result if he beats the younger son.
7. The father divides up the estate and the young son turns his share into cash. He travels far away to escape his father and the village.
8. Wild living does not necessarily mean he spent his money on prostitutes. More likely it is extravagance, wanting to be seen as generous, which is a great virtue in the Middle-East. "The drinks are on me!"
9. Famines were not uncommon in that time and were devastating.
10. He becomes so desperate he feeds pigs for a Gentile. Jesus paints the young son as the model sinner, violating all the Pharisees' holiness rules. What could be worse to a Pharisee?
11. He came to his senses or came to himself. He realizes home is not so bad after all. However, he does not yet see he has broken his father's heart. He is not sorry for hurting his father but for wasting all of his money.
12. Hired servants were the lowest people on the social scale in a family, even lower than house slaves, because the slave was considered part of the family.
13. He formulates a plan. He will confess his sin. He will compensate his father, even if it means being a hired servant and it takes him the rest of his life to earn back the money. He will demonstrate his sincerity by running the gauntlet through the village and submitting to the inevitable beating by his father. Notice how this coincides with the Pharisees' version of repentance. The younger son is both the model sinner and the model repentant in the Pharisees' eyes.
14. The village would turn out to watch the spectacle. Long before he reaches his father's house the youths of the village will pelt him with rocks, people will hurl insults at him and spit on him for shaming their village. His father then would be expected to beat him as punishment.
15. The father short-circuits the young son's plan. Before he enters the village the father has compassion on him and runs to his boy. A man of the father's age never runs

anywhere in the village. It is not dignified. In order to run he must lift up his robes. This will expose his underwear, which is shocking and shameful.

16. Before his son can run the gauntlet of derision through the village, the father takes all the shock, derision, and shame upon himself that the son deserved. Here is the cross in the Prodigal Son. *Hebrews 12:2: Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

17. The son now for the first time sees he has broken his father's heart. He is shattered. He drops his plan of repentance and earning the money back. He simply confesses his sin and throws himself on his father's mercy.

18. The father now restores the son in the eyes of the village, his servants, and the elders of the village. The robe, ring and shoes show everyone that his son now acts with the father's authority. He is a son and not a slave. Only sons wore shoes, slaves went barefoot.

19. A calf is slaughtered at only the most special times. The most important people in the village will be invited to the banquet. Everyone will celebrate. The people who are not invited will stand outside the house watching through the gate and the windows. A banquet like this is a public affair.

## **II. PART TWO: THE OLDER SON**

**Luke 15:25-32:** *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'*

*"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

*'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'*"

### **C. Step Three: Literary Structure –**

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field.

When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants (boys) and asked him what was going on. (**he comes**)

'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' (**your brother - safe, a feast**)

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. (**a father comes to reconcile**)

But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. (**complaint #1 - how you treat me**)

But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' (**complaint #2 - how you treat him**)

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. (**a father tries to reconcile**)

But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" (**your brother - safe, a feast**)

*[And he came and entered the house, joined in the music and dancing and was reconciled to his brother.*

*And the father celebrated with his sons.] (the end is missing - he goes in?????)*

#### **Notes:**

1. The ending of the parable is deliberately left off by Jesus. We are never told how the older brother responds to the father's appeal. The Pharisees responded to Jesus by manipulating Pilate to have him crucified.

#### **D. Step Four: Cultural Background –**

1. The family is wealthy because the older son is out in the fields supervising the workers and servants.

2. He returns, hears the music and dancing, probably a drum and a dance troop, a group of men from the village inside the house.

3. The windows and gate would be open so everyone could see, and a crowd of people and youths would be outside watching. Most of the village would be there.

4. The older son calls one of the "servants" – NIV, but the word can also mean youth. This is more likely because the gang of youths would have gathered to harass the younger son through the village. Now they are watching the amazing events of the day! The youth also replies, "your father." If he had been one of the servants he would have likely said "my master."
5. The older son is angry because everything in the house is legally his. He has possession but not disposition of the estate until his father dies. Perhaps he resents not being consulted before a calf was butchered.
6. At a banquet the older son is expected to be head-waiter. The only difference between the eldest son and the servants is he talks to the guests and the servants do not. This communicates to the guests how important they are to the family that the eldest son is their servant.
7. The expectation is that the eldest son would take on this task, especially for the guest of honor, which in this case is his hated younger brother.
8. He is probably angry with his father for not beating his younger brother and satisfying both village honor and the family's honor.
9. He refuses to enter the banquet. At the very least the members of the family are expected to greet their guests, shaking hands and making apologies if they cannot stay. By staying outside, he insults the guests and publicly and deeply insults his father. He shows the village that his father is a poor father because he has no control over his sons. The natural expectation of the guests and the village watching outside would be for the father to come out and beat his oldest son into submission.
10. An open rupture has occurred between the father and his eldest son. All wait tensely to see what the father will do. The elder son's insult and rebellion is just as serious as the younger son's had been. Either the father will come out and beat his son or ignore him now and beat him later.
11. For the second time that day the father takes the shame upon himself and goes out to meet a rebellious son. He goes out to reconcile himself to his son and to his brother. It is the only way he can gain a son who will obey him out of love.
12. The banquet guests are shocked as the father deliberately humiliates himself before the whole village.
13. The elder son is now condemned out of his own mouth. He refuses any responsibility for the loss of his brother. The shepherd and the woman did, but he does not. He rebels against his father, and insults him by leaving off the title, "O my father."

14. The younger son was a rebel and knew it. The older son is also a rebel but does not know it. He has broken his relationship with his father and not a law. The law he has fulfilled to the letter.

15. He refuses partnership with his father but instead cries out for his rights.

16. He despises his brother calling him "your son" and fabricates the account about prostitutes. He does not know how his brother ended up in poverty.

17. He refuses to acknowledge the portion his father gave to the brother was legitimate, yet he complains he can't do what he wants with his portion.

18. He refuses to welcome his brother or be reconciled to his father.

19. He understands his relationship with his father as a servant and not a son. He has done his duty, never neglected it, now he wants his reward. Servants demand their rights; sons serve in love and joy.

20. He needs to be forgiven by his father and brother but does not see it. He is full of scorn and pride, but sees his own actions as honorable and righteous.

21. The father only corrects him by saying "*your brother*" when he had called him "*your son*". He uses the endearing term "*O my boy*" (NIV – *my son*), showing his love for his eldest son.

22. The rest of the father's speech is a defense of joy! The shepherd didn't have to explain his joy to his neighbors nor the woman to hers. Yet this is what the father is forced to do with his son. How sad is the Pharisees complaint that Jesus eats with sinners!

### **E. Step Five: Original Decision-Response –**

Pharisees: We are in the ridiculous position of the older son. We need to repent and join Jesus in his celebration over lost sinners, including us!

### **F. Step Six: Theological Themes –**

1. Two types of sin and repentance are demonstrated. The one is of a man who thinks he can save himself, the other of a man who knows he cannot.

2. Jesus clearly defines sin in a very Hebrew way: rebellion! When we sin we deliberately break our relationship with God our Creator. We don't just break God's Law; we break his heart!



3. Jesus shows that legalism, ala the Pharisees, leads to spiritual pride and a blindness to one's sin. It is incapable of restoring our relationship with God that sin has broken. It also causes us to be judgmental and condemn those who do not follow our rules.

3. Grace is seen through the father's freely offered suffering love for his two sons. There is nothing we can do to earn that love. God seeks and suffers for us in order to save us.

Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard said, *"When it is a question of a sinner He does not merely stand still, open his arms and say, 'Come hither;'* no, *He stands there and waits, as the father of the lost son waited, rather He does not stand and wait, He goes forth to seek, as the shepherd sought the lost sheep, as the woman sought the lost coin. He goes – yet no, He has gone, but infinitely farther than any shepherd or any woman, He went, in sooth, the infinitely long way from being God to becoming man, and that way He went in search of sinners."*

4. Joy is known in finding and celebrating in community the restoration of one who was lost.

Henri Nouwen said, *"God rejoices. Not because the problems of the world have been solved, not because all human pain and suffering have come to an end, nor because thousands of people have been converted and are now praising him for his goodness. No, God rejoices because **one** of his children who was lost has been found."*

5. God desires that we be his children, sons and daughters who obey him out of gratitude and love, rather than servants who obey out of fear and duty.

6. Jesus clearly paints the cross in the humility of the father running to the younger son and his going out to plead with the older son to come inside and celebrate. Jesus shows us God is the humble God. Jesus pleads with sinners to be reconciled to God. At the beginning of the parable He is locked in conflict with the Pharisees over the question of eating and fellowshiping with sinners. At the end of the parable the father is locked in conflict with the older son over the question of the father's welcome of the younger son. The parallels are unmistakable.

7. The Messiah's banquet and celebration has begun; he invites us to come and share with him. It is no accident that Jesus gave us a simple meal to be shared together as a community, to remember and celebrate what he has done for us: Communion!

**NEXT WEEK (December 13): *The Nobleman in the Far Country (The Parable of the Talents) – Luke 19:11-27***