

Lost Son; Loving Father

Luke 15:11-24

Pastor John Miller

I want to go back to Luke 15:1-3 to set the context for what we will look at beginning in verse 11.

Luke says, "Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him..." that is, "Jesus" "...to hear Him." Tax collectors were Jews who were hated and despised by the Jewish people. And sinners were just run-of-the-mill, wicked people. "And the Pharisees and scribes..." the religious Jews "...complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.' So He spoke this parable to them, saying...." He technically gave three parables.

The first parable was of the lost sheep, in verses 4-7. A shepherd had 100 sheep, and as he put them in the sheep fold at night, he counted them as they went through the gate and saw that one was missing. If I was the shepherd, I'd say, "Too bad. Good riddance, you stupid sheep! You should have stayed with the group!" But not this shepherd; he loved and valued the sheep, so he left the 99 and went into the wilderness and searched for and found the one, lost sheep. He put it on his shoulder, came back rejoicing and called his friends to party and rejoice with him because the sheep had been found.

This parable was directed toward the attitude and murmuring of the Pharisees and scribes. They should have been rejoicing over sinners coming to Christ instead of murmuring against Jesus.

The second parable, in verses 8-10, was the parable of the lost coin. The woman had 10, silver coins. They probably were worn as jewelry around her head as a headband or as a necklace. One of the coins fell off the headband or necklace and was lost in her house. So she lit a lamp and searched for it, sweeping the floor.

So the sheep was lost and the shepherd searched for it until he found it. The coin was lost, and the woman searched for it until she found it. It would have been easy to say, "Oh well; it's only one coin out of 10. No big deal" and let it go. But instead she went after it.

This shows the heart of God. It is the revelation of the Father. He loves, He seeks unsaved people. He wants to bring them to Himself.

A.W. Tozer said in his wonderful book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." I like that. And I think the reason it is "the most important thing about us" is because many of life's greatest problems are solved when we think right about God. It's so important that we think right about God. And if there ever was a revelation of God in the Bible, it is Luke 15; it shows us that God loves us, God seeks us, God restores us and God forgives those who are sinful who turn to Him and come to Him.

Now we come to our third parable in Luke 15: the parable of the lost son and the loving Father, more commonly known as the prodigal son. There actually are two sons in the parable. We'll talk about the younger son today and the older son the next time. But the parable is actually not about the son or sons but about the Father. Nine, different times in our text we read the word "father." It's all about God and God's heart for the lost. He loves those who run away from Him and welcomes them back and forgives them.

There are three divisions I want to cover with you today. The first is the son rebelling, in verses 11-16. "Then He said: 'A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So he divided to them his livelihood.'" Notice the first words out of the younger son's mouth: "give me." The father gave him his inheritance.

Verse 13, "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions..." that's where we get the word "prodigal" "...with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything."

In verse 11, we see the younger son leaving his father's house. "A certain man had two sons." So we go from 100 sheep, one of which gets lost and is found to 10 coins, one of which gets lost and is found and now to two sons, both of which are lost. The younger son commits sins of the flesh, and the older son commits sins of the spirit or attitude sins. You can sin in either attitudes or actions. You may look good on the outside, but your heart may not be right or is in rebellion to God.

"a certain man" represents God the Father, the younger son and the older son.

Verse 12, "And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me....'" This is where it all starts; "I want what I want." He worshipped the holy trinity: me, myself and I. Selfishness is the root cause of all sin. "I don't care about God," Who is the Father in the parable. "I don't care about my brother, I don't care about anyone else. I want what I want and I want it now!" So the younger son said, "'Give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them..." both the younger and older sons "...his livelihood."

In Biblical times, how the inheritance worked is that the older son would get two-thirds of the inheritance and the younger son would get one-third. But in this parable, the father actually distributed the inheritance to both sons.

This is a very harsh thing what the younger son did. His father was not yet dead, but he didn't want to wait until his father died to receive his inheritance. "I want my inheritance right now! I want to cut off all ties, all relationships with my family, so give me my portion of the inheritance now! And I'm going to split this town and go somewhere else really fun. I'm going to have a

good time and be free from parental control.”

This younger son may have been in his late teens. Scripture doesn't indicate he was married, even though they married at a young age in those days—from 18 to 23. So he probably was 16 or 17 years old. But he wanted his inheritance and he wanted to party, so he demanded that his father give it to him.

The father could give his inheritance early, but only if he decided to do that—not just because he was pressured by his son. But this was a breach of etiquette and a very hurtful thing the younger son did in demanding his father give him his inheritance. It was as though he was saying, “I want you dead so I can have my money and can leave!”

Verse 13, “And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together...” which means that he liquidated all his inheritance into cash, including the property, which he sold “...journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.” We don't know what country he split to, but he wanted to go as far away from the father as he could.

So we see, number one, his selfishness; number two, he was hurtful to his father; and number three, he wanted to go somewhere else far away.

I grew up in San Bernardino. All I wanted to do was get out of San Bernardino. Ever been to San Bernardino? Can you blame me? And then the Lord saved me, made me a pastor and I was there for 39 years pastoring a church in San Bernardino. The Lord has a real sense of humor!

So all this younger son wanted to do was get his money and go have a good time. Selfishness entered into the picture. “I'm going to party hardy! I'm going to live it up and have a blast!” But Jesus said, “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

When I was young I wanted to have a good time. I wanted to party and hang out with my friends and do what I wanted to do. But I didn't want to give my life to Jesus Christ. Yet it is in giving your life to Christ that you find life. It's in living for self that you actually lose your life.

Then this younger son “wasted his substance with riotous living,” it says in the King James translation.

Verse 14, “But when he had spent all...” he had lots of friends until the money ran out “...there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.” He was being very foolish and wasteful, even though the famine wasn't his fault. Now he was needy; he was hungry, homeless, hurting and friendless.

Put this alongside Psalm 23:1, which says, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” It means when the Lord is your shepherd, you have everything you need, both in life and in death and in eternity. If the Lord is not your shepherd, then you're like a sheep without a shepherd,

and you're just aimlessly wandering around empty. The Bible says, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).

So the younger son began to be in want, and he would hit rock bottom. Verse 15, "Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." What could be lower than feeding pigs for a Jewish boy?! Nothing. This is like the lowest of the low. He was destitute, alone, homeless, hungry, his clothes were rags, he probably stunk like a pig and he's in the pig pen.

Verse 16, "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything." But even the pigs wouldn't share their food with him.

to loneliness, sadness, emptiness. Holiness leads to happiness. If you rebel against God your Maker, God your Creator, the One who designed you to have fellowship with Him, your life will be empty. But if you surrender to God, if you get your life lined up with God, you'll find purpose and fulfillment.

The second division of our text is in verses 17-20. We see the son repenting. The first division was the son rebelling; now we see him repenting. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise...' he's just thinking out loud in the pig pen '...and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father." This is the son repenting.

I want you to note some things. Number one, it said, "He came to himself." So he saw his true condition. I've always liked this, because God, in His grace and in His mercy, comes to us in our sinful, insane condition, and He brings us to our senses. That's what it means where it says, "He came to himself." Sin is insanity. Romans 1 describes people who reject God, and they end up with reprobate minds. That means a mind that cannot work. If you reject the truth in God, you'll just believe a lie. It's the insanity of a sinful lifestyle.

But this younger son "came to himself." It is a blessing, a grace, a gift from God when He opens our eyes to our need for Him, when He brings us to the reality of our true condition. This son saw his true condition.

Number two, he made an honest confession. He said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned.'" That's the best thing you can do; admit you are a sinner and that you have fallen short of the standards of God's law. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "I have sinned" are three of the most important words you could ever utter.

"against heaven and before you," meaning his Father. Sin, first of all and most importantly, is against God. We have broken God's standards. We have violated God's laws.

And sin can also be against people. When David sinned against Bathsheba, he committed adultery and murdered her husband. He wrote in Psalm 51:4, after he was exposed by Nathan the prophet, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight."

The Bible says that repentance is seeing yourself as a sinner before a holy, righteous God. "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10). So the son said, "I have sinned."

Number three, the son felt his unworthiness, his brokenness. He said, in verse 19, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." A hired servant is like a day-laborer. He wasn't asking to be a slave or to be a son; he just wanted to be a servant. He just wanted a job so that he could feed himself.

Number four, he arose and came to his father, verse 20.

So he saw his true condition, verse 17; he made an honest confession, verse 18; he had a humble admission, verse 19—"I am no longer worthy"; and he had true repentance, verse 20—he came to his father.

"Repentance" in the Greek is the word "metanoia," which means "to change your mind." What do you change your mind about? That you're a sinner, Jesus is the Savior, you need to turn from your sin, seek God and ask for His forgiveness. And you change your mind about the way you're living, what you're doing and your attitude. You admit you're a sinner. So this involves a turning around. That's repentance.

Some of you need to come to your senses. You need to be humbled and admit that you've sinned. You need to come with brokenness and godly sorrow and true repentance. Romans 2:4 says, "The goodness of God leads you to repentance."

The younger son said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" So he is brought back to the goodness of God, and he wants to repent.

Are you far from God? I pray that God grants you repentance; that you change your mind, turn around and you pursue the Lord.

The last section of our text is verses 20-24. This is the father forgiving and the father restoring. Now the son is on his way back to his father's house when the father saw him. "But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." He kissed him repeatedly. Now the son gives the message he planned to give his father when he arrived. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" The father stopped him at this point; he didn't get to ask his father if he could just be one of his hired servants. The son probably realized that his father must have already forgiven me, because his father was hugging and kissing him.

Verse 22, "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him...' he was still covered with pig smell and mud '...and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry...' let's have a party '... for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."

In verse 14, it said that "He began to be in want"; now in verse 24, "They began to be merry."

Remember that when the sheep was found, they celebrated. When the coin was found, they celebrated. Now when the younger son was lost but is now found, they celebrated. Except for the older brother. And we'll see about that next time. So they all had a big party.

I want you to know what the father does, verse 20. It says that "His father saw him." God knows you and sees you. He knows your heart and your thoughts. He knows what you'll think, even before you think it. God is looking for you and longing for you. God is desiring that you come to Him.

The father saw the son before the son saw the father. And it says that "He was still a great way off" when he saw his son. I wonder how far off he was. One of the things I want to ask the Lord when I get to heaven is, "How far away in your story was the son when the father saw him and recognized him?" It was "a great way off," and the father was yearning and longing for his son.

The father also had compassion on his son. You would think the father would be angry and would want to punish his son. You would think he would reject his son. You would think that at the very least, he would put him on a curfew, on probation for a while.

This is a picture of the heart of God the Father. God loves and has compassion for the lost sinner.

Then the father "ran" toward his son. For a man to run in that culture and time was unheard of. It was undignified. No adult male would ever run. They wore long robes, so it was difficult to run in them. But the father threw off his dignity and began to run toward his son.

Then the father said, in verse 22, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet." The robe would be a beautiful, celebration robe to be worn for only the most lavish occasion. The ring probably was the family signet ring, indicating he was to be fully restored as a son and could do business for the family. And the sandals would indicate that he was a son and no longer poor. Poor people didn't have shoes. Sons had shoes. There was an old, Black spiritual that the slaves used to sing, which says, "All God's children got shoes." I like that. So we belong to the Father. He puts shoes on his feet.

And then he had "the fatted calf" killed, verse 23. This is a rare thing. They would fatten up a calf for a special occasion. And the father threw this great, big party.

My favorite description is in verse 20: the father "fell on his neck and kissed him." He actually

collapsed on his son's neck and smothered him with kisses.

The parables are windows through which we can look to see God. This father's response to the son's repentance shows us the heart of God the Father. Jesus said, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Some people think they have to clean up their life in order to come to God.

"Why don't you trust Jesus?"

"I'm not good enough; I'm a wicked sinner." But that's what you're supposed to do; you're supposed to come with all your sins. The Father didn't say, "Clean up your life. Then you can come home." You come just the way you are. Then He cleans us up and makes us fit for heaven.

The father didn't put any stipulations or terms on his son; he accepted him just the way he was, forgave him, reinstated him as his son and brought him into his family.

Everything the younger son was looking for was found back in the father's house. And everything you are looking for is found with the Father, whose arms are open wide, who loves you and longs for you to come to Him. He will kiss you, embrace you, clothe you, accept you, forgive you and bring you into His family—if you will just turn to him today. Or you can live in the far country empty, alone and missing out on all the joy of having your sin forgiven.

This is not only a window through which we see the heart of God; it is a mirror in which we can see ourselves. Perhaps you can see yourself in this prodigal son.

I was raised in a Christian home. When I was eight years old, I walked down the aisle in a church, I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart. I felt I had been changed. I went out of church that night, and the stars were brighter and lighter. I knew God had touched my life and changed me. But it wasn't too many years later that I was in middle school and then high school. I got in with a crowd of guys who were doing things that were illegal, wrong, and I got arrested and was thrown in juvenile hall. Your pastor's an ex-con.

I spent one night in juvenile hall, and that caused me to turn back to God. I was with two other guys, who were in the cell together across from me. They were goofing off and having fun. But God put me alone in the cell that night. I lay on that bed and cried out to God. I asked Him to forgive me. I said that I would go back to my Father's house. And it was just before my senior year of high school when I would graduate, that I turned back to the Lord.

I'm so thankful for that time, when God loved me and pursued me. God allowed me to hit rock bottom, so that I looked up and said, "God, I need You! God, I'm sorry! God, please forgive me!" I came to my senses then—thank God!—because of His grace. I turned back to God and He forgave my sins.

And what a blessing it's been to walk with God and to serve the Lord these many years.

Maybe you have a similar story. Maybe you're still far from God. Maybe you've wondered far, far from God. If you feel far from God, He hasn't moved, He hasn't gone anywhere. God still loves you and longs to have fellowship with you. But you must admit that you're a sinner. You must return to the Father. You must receive His gift of eternal life.

There are three simple steps to do that. First, you realize you are a sinner. Second, repent, which means to change your mind and turn from your sins. And third, receive Jesus Christ today as your Lord and Savior. Amen.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you're not sure you're a child of God—maybe you don't know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you've never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. I pray that You'll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We'd like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we'd like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, “I prayed to accept Christ.” We'll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.