



Luke Chapter 15

- Parable of the Shepherd and the Lost Sheep
- Parable of the Woman and the Lost Coin
- **Parable of the Father and the Lost Son**
- All three are mirrors of each other
- Context is everything

The Parable of the Lost Son

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

The Parable of the Lost Son

¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “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! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’”

The Parable of the Lost Son

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate

Audience

- Pharisees
- Strictly adherent to the law and condemned those who didn't
- Ceremonial cleanliness was their main deal
 - Keep the Law
 - Don't touch dead things, injured things, sick people
 - Don't mix with the wrong crowd
 - Don't eat pork! Or any thing unkosher
 - Don't even keep pigs!

The Son's Request

- Most of us think nothing of it
- There are recorded instances of a father dividing his estate among heirs while he is still living. Abraham did this to avoid conflict within his own tribe. (Genesis 13)
- The idea that a son would request the division of the estate by his living father was unthinkable.
- There is no evidence of this ever happening in the written record!

The Son's Request

- The younger son's request is equivalent to wishing his father's death.
- The father is in the way of the son's plans and the son wants to get on with it.
- So offensive is the idea that the father probably would not have been blamed for killing his impudent son on the spot!

What is Wrong with the Son's Request?

- The older son's role in such a case should be the role of mediator, confronting his younger brother and telling him to beg forgiveness.
- He should be interceding with the father begging him to have mercy on his brother.
- What do we get from the older son? Silence.
- Something is missing with the older son in this story.
- Of course, the most scandalous thing of all is that the father grants his son's request without protest.

What is Wrong with the Son's Request?

- Here we have more insult to the father.
- In cases where a father divided his estate with his sons while living, both the father and son were prohibited from independently selling off parts of the estate.
- Furthermore, while technically belonging to the son, the father had claim to the estate for his own survival and care.
- Here the son sells the estate and leaves, depriving his father of the livelihood he was entitled to.

What is Wrong with the Son's Request?

- Normally it would take months to resolve the issues of dividing an estate. Yet verse 13 says "A few days later" the son took his inheritance and ran.
- He no doubt found someone nearby and did a sub-prime (below market value) transaction, to get a quick sale
- Why was he in such a hurry?
- Because he knew that if the village found out what he had done they would have been furious.
- He was racing the clock to avoid having his deeds discovered before he could leave town.

Past the Point of no Return?

- Later on in this story the older brother will accuse the younger brother of living like a heathen, spending his money on prostitutes.
- the Greek words don't carry a connotation of immorality.
- They simply mean he was reckless with his money and didn't watch his finances.
- This will become important later in the story.

Past the Point of no Return??

- Verse 14 and 15 points out that the younger son is now in dilemma.
- The Jews were prohibited from selling their land to gentiles.
- If a Jew did such a thing, the community would perform a ceremony that cut that person off from the life of the community.
- The only way to return to the community was to repurchase the land.
- Not only has the son disrespected his father but he cannot return to the village because of his offense of squandering his inheritance with gentiles.
- Now he has no resources and cannot regain his estate.

Past the Point of no Return?

- In Middle Eastern culture you can't deny someone's request for assistance but one way to get rid of a person was to make their life so miserable that they moved on.
- According to the Torah, Jews could not eat pigs or touch a pig carcass. Technically, feeding pigs was not prohibited. but, the Pharisees would have considered such work unacceptable.
- This gentile citizen was clearly trying to rid himself of this son.
- Carobs (pods) were of little nutritional value to human being and his desire to eat them was in essence a way of saying he wished he was a pig!

He Comes to Himself

- Does this mean he repented?
- No, he just realises that there must be other options
- He has disrespected his father
- His older brother now controls the remaining estate
- The community may be ready to stone him as soon as he shows his face.
- These obstacles now appears preferable to his present dilemma

He Comes to Himself

18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

- “I am no longer worthy” can be translated two ways.
- It could mean that he permanently is no longer worthy. This is how it is most often translated
- It could also mean “I am presently not worthy” leaving open the option that he might once again be worthy at some future date, so he is unworthy now, but he could alter his status.

He Comes to Himself

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- Second, "hired hands" is not equivalent to slaves.
- In ascending rank were slaves, bond servants, free laborers and family in a large household. The younger son sees himself occupying a role just one step below a family member while he earns his way back into his father's good graces.
- He seems to see his situation as largely a matter of financial mismanagement and is oblivious the damage he has done to relationships.

He Comes to Himself

- It is possible that the religious leaders listening to the story would almost certainly have in agreement with where this story
- “We must first acknowledge our guilt and then earn our way back into God’s good graces” they would say.
- They likely envisioned the father’s response to the approaching son as one of disgust and anger.
- The village would likely cut him off from community life and the father ***might*** relent enough to allow the son to work on his estate.

The Response of the Father

20 But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

- in Jesus' day, the wealthy lived at the centre with decreasing wealth as you moved out
- We know that the father is a wealthy man and therefore lives at the centre of the city.
- Such a man would have had much dignity and respect. In public, they wore robes that covered them down to their ankles.
- They moved about gracefully in keeping with their social position.

The Response of the Father

20 But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

- The image Jesus paints is of this father at his estate in the centre of the village looking diligently into the distance, anticipating the return of his son.
- It is entirely possible that if the son reaches the village and is recognized, the townspeople may assault him.
- The father sees him “while he was still far off.” The double meaning is distance both in geography and relationship.
- Jesus says the father “was filled with compassion” and then “he ran!”

The Response of the Father

- To run to meet his son the father would need to gather up his robes, thus exposing his legs as he ran.
- For such a man to even show his ankles in public was not dissimilar to someone dropping their pants today.
- The image is of the father humiliating himself before the village as runs out to greet his son.
- This is completely undignified

The Response of the Father

- In circumstances like this the son should fall on the ground in front of his father and grovel
- Here the father runs and grabs his son before the son can greet him and kiss his son on the neck signifying complete acceptance and welcome.
- Culturally, this would have been incredibly shocking to witness if you knew the situation
- The villages were sure to have witnessed this vulgar display of indignity!

The Response of the Son

- The astonishing love his father has is overwhelming
- The son realises that there is no way he can earn his way back into his father's graces.
- He now realises how horrendous were his deeds.
- He is overwhelmed by the grace his father shows him.
- He can't even ask to be a servant!
- This is all happening in front of the entire community

The Actions of the Father

- Before the community the father tells the servants to bring his best robe, a ring, and sandals.
 - The robe means that the father's status is now conferred on the son.
 - The ring is likely a signet ring signifying the son has the father's authority.
 - The sandals signify that the son is a free man, as only free men wore sandals.
- The father imputed his character to his son in front of all the witnesses.
- Who would now dare to initiate a ceremony to cut the son off from the community?

The Actions of the Father

23 And get the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

- Killing a calf for the village to celebrate is the kind of action that would be done for visiting royalty like a king or prince.
- To kill a fattened calf would mean that you are expecting a very large crowd.
- Once an animal was killed it was assumed it would be consumed then and there.
- Truly the father intended this to be a celebration of celebrations for his lost son.

Themes

- **A. DEATH** *The younger basically wishes his father dead to get an inheritance.*
- **B. ALL IS LOST** *He squanders it all and becomes destitute*
- **C. REJECTION** *He hire himself out doing a job that is basically designed to make him leave*
- **D. THE PROBLEM?** *He realises he is in a desperate situation*
- **D. THE SOLUTION?** *He devises a plan to become a servant of his father*
- **C. ACCEPTANCE** *the father welcomes him back unconditionally not asking for an apology*
- **B. ALL IS RESTORED** *His status is completely restored to sonship*
- **A. RESSURECTION** *there is much celebration for all the community*

Take Home

- People wander off from God
- They break His heart, but He loves them no less
- They can only truly return when they realise how low they have fallen
- The act of coming back brings humility and brokenness
- When they do come back God welcomes us such that we can NEVER fall away again

Lessons Learned – God Acts for us

