

**Text:** Luke 15:1-32

**Title:** Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Sons

**Truth:** God is happy when a sinner responds to Christ with repentant faith.

**Date/Location:** Sunday August 13, 2017 and November 10, 2024 at FBC

## Introduction

Usually parables are quite short and have a single main idea. In this passage there are three parables that teach the same basic point. The one about the prodigal son is an extended story with several lessons embedded in it:

1. The lesson of the younger brother.
2. The lesson of the father.
3. The lesson of the older brother.

The story Jesus tells is very familiar to us. It also has a few pitfalls that we must avoid:

1. Many people have confused the ideas of biological sonship in the **story** with spiritual sonship in the **lesson** being taught. Do not mix the two! The **spiritual** condition of the **biological** sons can be deduced from the evidence of their behavior at various points in the story.
2. Based on v. 24 and 32, some may think that the son was spiritually alive initially, then died (lost salvation), then regained it. Theologically this is impossible.

As a result of these features, it will take all of our interpretive energy to make sure that we understand this parable properly.

## I. The Setting, 15:1-10

A. The setting is very important to determine the lessons in the story. The main thing that really perturbed Jesus was that the Pharisees and scribes *complained* that he associated with sinners and even *ate a meal* with them (Matthew 9:10-13, 11:19; Acts 10:28). As if the Pharisees themselves were so perfect! They thought they were good, but they were only hypocrites.

1. The Pharisees and scribes said one thing and did another; they appeared on the outside one way but on the inside they were dirty people. They didn't care about the important things in God's Law; they loved power and prestige, but they did not love God. They were slaves of sin while claiming to be free. They sent people to Hell faster than they went there themselves. They made promises with their fingers crossed. And they were largely responsible for killing Jesus, the only sinless person who ever lived.
2. Notice the tax collectors and sinners came to **hear** Jesus teach in response to his call in 14:35 (he who has ears to hear, let him hear!). The Pharisees came to **complain**!

- B. The stories about the sheep and coin introduce the idea that it is altogether *reasonable*—not complaint-worthy—that someone would search diligently for a person who is lost and needs help. And when they find that person, it is reasonable and expected that they gather their friends and neighbors and express joy. Late in 2014, authorities found a 13-year old boy missing for four years from his mom. He was hidden behind a false wall in a home near Atlanta, Georgia to keep him from authorities. What joy must have been in the heart of the mother of that child! In the same way Heaven rejoices more over a person's repentance than over 99 people who claim they need no repentance.

## **II. The Lesson of the Younger Brother, 15:11-19**

- A. This young man was probably late teens/early twenties. He thought life in his father's house was stupid and he wanted to go and live it up and have some fun. But he needed money to do that, so he asked dad for his portion of the inheritance. His inheritance was probably 1/3 of the father's estate. The firstborn would traditionally receive 2/3. Regardless, this young man was going all out—treating his dad as good as dead, taking the money, and running. He shows no respect for his father, his upbringing, or good morals. He is the embodiment of pure selfishness. The dad and brother effectively had to consider the young man as dead and gone. He was a black sheep, completely estranged from the family.
- B. So he left his family, his dad, and his brother. And he lived foolishly. He wasted everything he had on prostitutes (15:30), and probably other things too. He was a “progenitor” because he spent his money recklessly and was wastefully extravagant. But his lifestyle was not just wasteful. It was wrong, evil, and sinful.
- C. What he sowed, he reaped. He planted the wind, and harvested the whirlwind (Gal. 6:7-8, Hosea 8:7). Besides being morally filthy, he was in poverty. Just at that time, a famine arose where he was. Such a situation which would require more money, not less, to sustain oneself, but he had nothing. So he became an indentured servant to a citizen of that country. His job was to feed pigs. He was hungry for days on end, perhaps for weeks, yet he had nothing to eat, and would have gladly stooped to the level of eating the pig food.
- D. The young man finally came to his senses. God used severe trials to bring him to his knees. He realized that he could be a servant in his own father's home and be better off than he was presently. Notice his humility. He was not going back in the same haughty way he went out. He is going back a humbled, lowly man. He realizes what he did was wrong from beginning to end, and he knew he was not worthy to be called a son of the father, whom he had disowned.
- E. What is the point of this part of the story? Many have suggested that this boy is like a Christian who professed faith in Jesus at an early age, then walked away from God for a while, and then “woke up” and returned to God.
1. That is not correct, although I understand the reasoning behind it—many people *have* departed from God. The reality is that many of them never had

God as their father in the first place, only having a superficial connection to religion in their youth. When it came to “prime time” to decide which way life was going to go, they chose the path of their deepest desires, and that was to go the route of the prodigal son.

2. What is really going on here is that the son represents a person who had no connection to God and manifested that fact when he came of age. He might have had some teaching about God from mom or dad or grandma, or none at all. He then goes and lives the life he wants to live. But along the way, God brings circumstances that cause him to realize that he is hopeless and needs to turn away from his foolish lifestyle and turn to Jesus Christ. He humbly repents and goes about asking his Father God to receive him.

F. Maybe your behavior doesn’t represent “pure selfishness.” But perhaps this young man represents you more than you want to admit. Where are you spiritually right now? Far from God? Come to your senses!! You have sinned against heaven and against people—and against yourself.

### III. The Lesson of the Father, 15:20-24

- A. The good news is that when a person comes to this point, God was already at work and stands ready to receive the penitent with open arms. That is illustrated by the father in our story. You will note he did not scold. He was **waiting** for his son. He ran to greet his son. He didn’t make him grovel. He didn’t give him the silent treatment. He embraced and kissed him. All of this added to the disgust of the Pharisees and scribes, who would *never* have done such a thing as dishonoring as the father did.
- B. At this point the son said his rehearsed (but true) lines. He was truly sorry for his actions and wanted to be accepted back on a far lesser level than when he left.
- C. What happens next could be described by the same word “prodigal” but in its positive meaning: “having or giving something on a lavish scale.” The father offered the best robe, ring, shoes, and celebratory meal for his son’s return.
- D. Why is dad happy? Because like the coin and the sheep, his son was lost and is now found. He was as good as dead, cut off from the family, never to be seen again, but has now become alive again. The boy didn’t deserve anything, but the grace of his father treated him bountifully.
- E. The lesson: the father in the story represents God and His attitude toward sinners. He receives them and will even one day share table fellowship with them, as Jesus the Son of God did. He is **glad** for sinners to come to repentance. Heaven rejoices at salvation—and any decision that a believer makes to follow God more diligently. God is not “above” them in the sense of treating them like the Pharisees treat them, as pariahs and untouchables, as objects of complaint and disdain. Jesus is glad when someone is saved. Do we care when or even if someone is saved?

### IV. The Lesson of the Older Brother, 15:25-32

- A. The older brother was initially unaware of the happenings up at the house (v. 25-27) so he asked a household servant about what was going on.
- B. The older brother became angry. He couldn't believe it. There was no way he could associate with his *former* brother.
- C. Notice how he answers his pleading father. He focused on himself! He was outwardly conforming, but inwardly he is the same as his younger sibling was before he left home! He exhibits no respect toward the idea of forgiveness.
- D. The father reminds his son that the remainder of the inheritance belongs to him. The older brother has everything and will have it all when the father dies.
- E. The father told the older brother it is RIGHT to be happy, because a lost one was found. It is morally RIGHT to do so. It is morally WRONG to act like the older brother and Pharisees by complaining and not extending forgiveness. He was just as selfish as the younger brother, but in a different way. He needed repentance as well, and obviously had never experienced God's forgiveness for his sins. The father and the older brother are opposites.
- F. The younger brother behaved as a prodigal in his wasteful and sinful lifestyle. The father behaved as a good prodigal in lavishing his love and forgiveness upon the younger son. But the older son thought that the father was a prodigal in the negative sense—that he was *reckless* and *wasteful* in his bestowing of forgiveness on the younger son. “Forgiveness toward that worthless excuse of a human being? Never!” The older brother may well have thought in terms of the shame/honor culture he lived in—because the younger brother shamed the family name, he was not to be held in honor by the family ever again. The culture had a baked in mentality of non-forgiveness. Christianity is superior to that aspect of culture and must change the culture.
- G. The older brother represents the hypocritical, unforgiving Pharisees. They did not understand what Jesus was doing with sinners, which is what Jesus still does today. The older brother is exactly a picture of the Pharisees. They complained; the older brother complained. They criticized Jesus for eating with sinners, the older brother criticized his dad for the same. They couldn't believe Jesus would forgive sinners, and the older brother was of the same opinion. When we turn from sin and “come home”, we come to a God who is like the generous father, and totally unlike the unforgiving older brother.

## Conclusion

What is your attitude toward a repentant sinner? Are you like the father or the older brother? Are you apathetic? Do you have more joy over a sinner's salvation than finding a lost material item? If not, there is something wrong with your priority structure. What about your attitude regarding associating with sinners? Do you try to figure out ways to associate with them, or to avoid it like the plague?