

## Where is My Fatted Calf?

Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

### Introduction

Last week, we looked at two parables that had much to do about the same thing. We read Jesus' parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin. In both of those parables, Jesus illustrated the need for seeking those who are lost, even if they might be considered undesirable, and then rejoicing when the lost are found. The parable we just read is one of the more familiar and beloved parables of Jesus. Many call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Parable of the Lost Son. A better title might be the Parable of the Compassionate Father and the Angry Son, as we see two different responses to receiving the lost. The story is really about how to respond to those who are lost. This parable, along with the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, are Jesus' response to the Pharisees and scribes complaining that He received sinners and tax collectors.

**Luke 15:1–2** <sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

For Jesus to “receive” these people meant more than just allowing them to associate with Him. It was an eager expectation of having them there. He wanted them to join Him. The Pharisees and scribes, however, did not like the sinners and tax collectors hanging around them. That is typical of some people. If something good happens, like people coming to Jesus or people coming to church, someone will criticize it. You can see something like this in little children. One child gets a special toy and another cries that he did not get one. Rather than rejoicing about the good that happens to another person, we want to complain about it. We are those children complaining about the good things happening to another child. Why is that? Should we not be happy when good things happen to a friend, a neighbor, a family or church member? That is what happened in this story. Something good happened but someone complained about it.

There are three characters in this story: a father, a younger (lost) son, and an older (angry) son. In the story, the younger son asked for his inheritance from his father, and then leaves his father for a foreign land. He then squanders his inheritance on reckless living, and ends up nearly dying from hunger. The parable describes the younger son being lost, his moment of decision, and the way his father and his older brother responded to his returning home. We can see at least four things being presented.

- Life Apart from God is Reckless
- The Way Home is by Repentance
- All Heaven Rejoices When A Sinner Repents
- We Should Celebrate the Lost Being Found

## **Life Apart from God is Reckless**

We have all kinds of ideas about what we should do in life. People try to find their purpose or place in this world in all sort of things. Some look for fulfillment in a job. Others, try to find it in an abundance of friends or family. Others look for satisfaction in the praise of men. For younger people, they may think that life would be so much better not being under mom and dad's rules. One of my favorite sayings goes something like this: "Teenagers, get a job, a house, food on the table, and pay your bills, since you now know everything." In the parable, the younger son wanted to have his inheritance and leave his family to live elsewhere. Going somewhere else to make a life was not necessarily the issue, but leaving his family to live the way he did was. He may have thought that he was better off without his father, but he would have been wrong.

The younger son took his inheritance, traveled to a foreign land, and then squandered his inheritance on reckless living. He spent it foolishly, wasting it on temporary pleasures. This reminds me of the government. The government "takes" our money (in the form of taxes) and often spends it wastefully on projects and services that are not really needed. If we accept the older son's description of the younger, this reckless living included wasting his wealth on prostitutes. The younger son wasted what his father had given him and this was a serious thing for a Jewish man to do. That could be us. Do we waste what God has given us on things that really do not matter? Do we spend God's money on things that we should not? Do we have an inappropriate view of money and debt? We need to use what God entrusts to us wisely and for His glory.

The situation got worse for the younger son. He ran out of money and then a famine occurred in the land. In order to survive, he hired himself to a Gentile to feed pigs. He was so hungry that he wanted to eat the food the pigs were eating. This would have been repugnant to a Jew as pigs were unclean animals (Lev. 11:7). The younger son was in a foreign land, working for a Gentile, feeding pigs and desiring to eat pig food. It was not a good situation. On top of that, no one helped him. All of his friends deserted him. When the money runs out, when the party is over, you will find out who your real friends are. That is life apart from God. Sin leads us into reckless living where we will perish. Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you can pay. The younger son found this out the hard way.

## **The Way Home is by Repentance**

In the story, the younger son found himself in a terrible, life threatening situation. Maybe he wondered how did it get so bad. Surely, his predicament was not what he had planned. But, he realized what had happened and what he needed to do. Have you been in those situations when the light bulb finally comes on? You realize your condition and what you need to do. Maybe life had spiraled way out of control. You made one wrong decision after another and found yourself in a desperate situation. Maybe you asked yourself, "How did I get to this place in my life?" Then, you come to your senses. You realize what has happened and you know what you need to do.

This parable tells us that the younger son literally “came to himself.” He realized who he was. He realized what he had done. He realized what predicament he was in and what he needed to do. He had not only squandered his earthly father’s property but he had also sinned against his heavenly Father. Admitting that you are wrong is often not easy to do, but it is the key to restoration. This parable demonstrates the need for repentance to fix the mess we often get ourselves into. There are three aspects that I think the lost, prodigal son shows us about repentance.

- *Repentance is a great awakening.* It is coming to one’s senses. It is realizing our dire circumstances. The younger son had hit rock bottom and finally realized who he was and what he had done. He realized he was wrong to leave his father.
- *Repentance is turning to the Father.* It is turning from a life in a strange and deadly place of sin to the Father’s house of abundant living. Repentance means saying, “I do not belong here. This is not my home. I need to go to my Father.” It is realizing that He alone is the source of true contentment and peace.
- *Repentance is confessing one’s sin.* The younger son took personal responsibility for his actions and confessed his sin. He knew he had no grounds for being treated like a son. He probably felt worthless and undeserving and threw himself upon the Father’s mercy. He said, “Father, I have sinned against you and heaven above.”

True repentance is *the way back home*.

### **All Heaven Rejoices When A Sinner Repents**

The far country to which the younger son went can represent freedom from his father. It was freedom from rules and freedom to do what he wanted. But it was also a foreign place. It is a place of open rebellion and selfishness. It was a place of extravagant, reckless living. It was also a place of famine and hunger, of loneliness and despair. This contrasts to the father’s home - a place of music and dancing, a place of joy and celebration, a place of abundance and feast. The Father’s home is a restful place, a place of honor and respect, of love and peace, and of abundant living. This parable, like the lost sheep and the lost coin, demonstrates the joy of coming home.

When the younger son came to himself, he headed back home. He knew that he had messed up, but he knew he was better off going back home. When he got home, he expected to be a servant of his father. He expected to be placed with his father’s hired servants. When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. He may have been watching for his son to return. Upon noticing his son returning to him, the father got up and ran to his lost son. It would have been undignified for someone of his wealth and importance to run to someone, but this father discarded dignity when he saw his son. The father felt compassion on his younger son and ran to him and embraced him with fatherly affection. The younger, prodigal son expected to be treated as one of his father’s hired servants, but instead he received much more. He expected to apply for a job as a servant. His father responded: “I do not need a servant. What I need is a son.”

The father put the best robe on his son. He put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. The father also slaughtered the fatted calf, which would have been reserved for special occasions, which this was. The younger son was assumed to be physically dead or at least missing from the family. What parent would not worry about his or her child being lost, or being hurt, or living a destructive lifestyle? What parent would not be overjoyed to finally find that child who had been lost or who had run away? That parent would most likely forget the wrong the child had done when the child returned home. That is like our heavenly father. When we turn to him in repentance and come home to Him, He forgets the past, He forgives the sin, and we become His children. The lost son expected servanthood, but he received honor and wealth instead. He received more than he expected and certainly more than he deserved. This is picture of the celebration in heaven when a sinner repents. All heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents.

### We Should Celebrate the Lost Being Found

Along with the father's celebration for finding his long lost son, this parable compels us to rejoice when sinners repent and come to Jesus. Literally, the passage said that *it was necessary* to celebrate. God requires His people to rejoice that salvation comes to sinners. Not everyone sees it that way. The older son did not rejoice to see his younger brother come home. The older son was coming home from working in the field and he heard the sound of music and dancing. When he found out that the celebration was for his younger brother who had left and was now back home, he was angry. He was so angry he would not even enter the house. The father came out to him and pleaded with him to come inside and celebrate with them. The older son replied with a list of accomplishments, describing how faithful he had been to his father, how he had never disobeyed him, and basically asked, "Where is my fatted calf?"

Rather than be happy that his younger brother was home and was safe, he was angry that this sinner who had squandered his inheritance on reckless living, was receiving a party. His father had accepted this sinner and was eating with him. Remember the criticism the Pharisees and scribes made against Jesus earlier in the chapter? They complained that Jesus received sinners and had dinner with them. In this parable, the father and his company were doing the same thing with the younger son who had squandered his inheritance on reckless living. The point of this parable is to reveal how we should receive sinners. Should we like the Pharisees and scribes reject them, or place a burden of a list of rules before we will associate with them? Or do we go to sinners, to unbelievers, and receive them as Jesus received them?

The parable really shows two ways to respond to those outside the church - with forgiving love or with unforgiving anger. The father displayed forgiving love in receiving his lost son back. The older brother displayed unforgiving anger when his younger brother came home. At the end of the story, we are left wondering if the older brother ever came in to celebrate. The father in the parable appealed to the older son showing that he still loved him and wanted him to also join the celebration. Jesus was inviting the Pharisees to repent and accept the good news, that salvation was available to sinners and tax collectors, and yes, to even Pharisees and scribes. Do we celebrate this?

## Conclusion

Which son are you? Are you the son who was or is lost? Are you the one who realizes your sin, acknowledges your reckless living and begs for the Father's forgiveness? Do you really see the need for God's grace in your life? Maybe you are like the younger son who was desperate and looking for a way out of a terrible situation. Go to the Father who loves you and desires to have you in the family. Or are you the son who thinks he is Ok? You believe you have been with the Father all this time and things are good. However, do you get angry that the Father accepts others that you consider unworthy of His affection? Do you wonder where your fatted calf is? Maybe you are like the older son holding on to bitterness, unforgiveness, even hatred toward someone else. Maybe you look at other people, even people in the church, and think to yourself that you are better than they are. Maybe you think things are good between you and God, but in reality they are not. Come home to Jesus. Turn from your sin and turn to Him. Scripture says that if we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive them.

Maybe you are content just coming to church on Sunday, thinking you have done your Christian duty but are not really in love with the Father. Maybe you are not really interested in seeing the lost come to the Father. You are happy to just sit in the pews, or maybe you don't make the effort to even be in church among other Christians, and let others do the work. Maybe you think you should just wait for the lost to come to God. Maybe you think it is enough to just invite people to church. You might believe that it is the preacher's job to tell them about Jesus. Look at the great love our Heavenly Father has and the way in which He has sought you through His Son Jesus Christ. Look at the compassionate and loving God who seeks the lost and throws a party when one comes home. If that is the God you serve, how can you hold back from sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others? How can you refuse to share this great love with others? Will we be the church of the older angry brother or the church of the loving and compassionate father? It is your choice. Which will it be? Amen!