

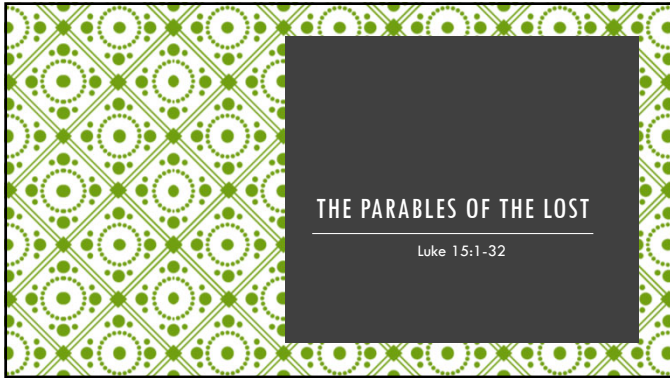
The Parables of Jesus

WEEK 5: THE PARABLES OF THE LOST

(LUKE 15:1-32)

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1

THREE PARABLES: ONE THEME

1. The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7)
2. The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)
3. The Lost Son(s) (Luke 15:11-32)

2

LUKE'S LITERARY DESIGN

All three parables are a response to the setting of vv. 1-2.

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Therefore, he spoke to them this parable.

3

LUKE'S LITERARY DESIGN

Three parables sharing a single theme.
The parables are ordered to form a climax

- 1 lost sheep out of **100**
- 1 lost coin out of **10**
- 1 lost **son** out of **2**

And the last are humans, children.



4

LUKE'S LITERARY DESIGN

The parables are phrased to require the listener's involvement:

- vv. 4-5, v. 8 are negative rhetorical questions – "Which one of you does not . . . ?"
- The answer is "no one." No one would not search for the sheep; no one would not turn the house upside down for the coin.



5

LUKE'S LITERARY DESIGN

The parables are thus deliberately exploiting the pathos of the experience of lost things.
A person who has lost something can only think of the thing he or she has lost.
Upon finding, there must be a celebration!
This is a natural, universal human experience.



6

LUKE'S LITERARY DESIGN

The parables draw a direct comparison from the story to the disposition of heaven (=God and his angels).

Just as humans rejoice in what they find, God and his angels rejoice in the finding of a lost sinner.

Thus the shepherd and the woman are (limited) images of God himself.

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LUKE'S LITERARY DESIGN

To the tax-collectors and sinners: this is how much God loves you; he "loses his mind" until he finds you.

To the Pharisees and scribes: you will never understand why Jesus eats with sinners until you understand that God is preoccupied with lost persons.

All of this prepares us for the clinching story: The Lost Son(s)

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THE LOST SON: CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

1. The early divestment of the inheritance.

- The younger son makes an egregious request: his share (=1/3) of his father's "property" (literally, his *bios* = life or life's work)
- By asking this, he essentially wishes that his father were dead.
- He is choosing to permanently sever ties with father and family.

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THE LOST SON: CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

2. The son's shameful behavior.

- Everything in the description of the son's behavior is a Jewish parent's worst nightmare!

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THE LOST SON: CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

- "Far country" – alienation from family, implying Gentile territory
- Squandered his property in "loose living" – drunkenness, immorality, licentiousness, irresponsibility.
- He becomes so poor that he "joins himself" (=indentured servitude) to a citizen of that country (i.e., an unclean Gentile)
- He became a servant of the unclean swine (!), whom he finally envied.

11

WHY DOES THE SON RETURN HOME?

Vv. 7 and 10 describe repentant sinners.

Is the son repentant?

Consider the son's soliloquy (vv. 17-19)

12

THE RESPONSE OF THE FATHER

But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him . . .”

. . . he had compassion . . .

. . . and running he fell upon his neck and repeatedly kissed him.

13

THE RESPONSE OF THE FATHER

Why was the father watching? Why did he run?

Running in public?

- Aristotle: “Great men never run in public.”
- Ben Sirach (19:30): “A man’s manner of walking tells you what he is.”
- K. Bailey: in traditional middle eastern cultures, a man of stature would never run but, rather, show his high status by walking slowly.



14

THE RESPONSE OF THE FATHER

Is there a special reason the father is watching and running?

- Perhaps the *qeşaşah*?
- Having shamed the father, the son would be met and shamed by the village in solidarity with the father.
- The father shames himself so that the son will not be shamed.



15

THE RESPONSE OF THE SON

According to the earliest Greek manuscripts, the son does not give his entire prepared speech.

• He gives the whole speech except: “Make me as one of your hired servants.” Why?

1. Either the father has cut him off (v. 22)
2. Or the son, seeing the father’s accepting love, sees that his scheme is irrelevant.

16

THE GIFTS OF THE FATHER

Best robe (lit. “first robe):

- The father’s own robe
- Theological significance?

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Is 61:10).

Ring on his hand = signet ring, a sign that he is reinstated into the family

Shoes on his feet = probably distinguishing him from the slaves

Kill the fatted calf and make merry

- there is no request for restitution
- the pattern is the same as the earlier two parables

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THE FATHER’S RESPONSE JUSTIFIED

“ . . . this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (cf. v. 32)

• “Lost and found” and “making merry” connects this parable directly to the two parables that precede it.

• Casting “lost and found” in terms of “life and death” shows the higher emotional content of this human story.

• This could be the satisfactory ending to the parable . . . but it isn’t.

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THE OLDER SON

The satisfactory ending of the parable (v. 24) is not the actual ending.

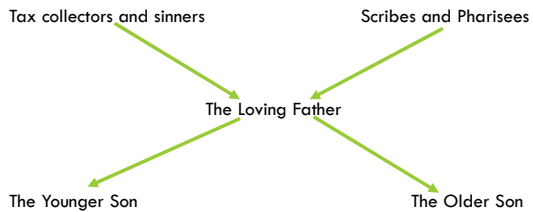
The parable continues with vv. 25-32; the older son becomes the focal point.

The three parables of lost-and-found, ending in celebrations, have been preparing for the depiction of older son.



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THE PARABLE AND ITS AUDIENCES



20

THE OLDER SON

Although the older son seems “found,” in the rejection of his younger brother, he is now lost in resentment.

By priding himself on his duty and in rejecting his younger brother, he is now estranged from his father.

The Pharisees are grumbling against Jesus because they do not understand that Jesus is the very revelation in action of the love of God.

In doing so, they show themselves, like the older brother, to be estranged from their Heavenly Father.



21

WHAT SHALL WE CALL THIS PARABLE?

Traditionally: The Prodigal Son

- focus on the wayward choices of the younger son
- no mention of the father and leaves the older son out altogether

Better: The Prodigal Father

- "Prodigal" means "excessive, unrestrained, extravagant"
- The "prodigal" in the parable is the father in his love