

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **The Parable of the Lost Son – Part 2**

*Luke 15:17-24*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

March 29, 2015

## The Parable of the Lost Son – Part 2

### Scripture

For the past few weeks we have been studying chapter 15 in *The Gospel of Luke*. It is a marvelous chapter as Jesus explained the good news of salvation in the parable of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son.

The parable of the lost son is usually called the parable of the prodigal son. There are three characters in this story. There is a father, an older son, and a younger son. Last week we examined part 1 of the parable of the lost son. We saw how the younger son rebelled against his father, asked for his share of the inheritance, went to a far country, and lost everything.

This week I want to examine the father's actions regarding the return of his younger son.

Keep in mind that Jesus was teaching this parable to the religious leaders. They were incensed that Jesus would associate with irreligious sinners. In fact, the religious leaders were furious with Jesus for eating with irreligious people. But, as D. A. Carson noted, Jesus taught that "God rejoices over the recovery of a lost sinner, and therefore it is Jesus' supreme desire to seek and save the lost (19:10)."<sup>1</sup> This parable in Luke 15 is the most beautiful illustration in all of Scripture about God's joy over the recovery of lost sinners. And as Carson said, "In just the same way, it is implied, the Pharisees should share in God's rejoicing over the salvation of the outcasts."<sup>2</sup>

Let's read the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32. For the sake of context, I shall read also verses 1-3, and our text for today, which is Luke 15:17-24:

---

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1005.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed., 1005.

<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."

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: . . . <sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> **"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! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"** <sup>20</sup> **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. <sup>21</sup> 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.'** <sup>22</sup> **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. <sup>23</sup> And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'** And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup> but he answered his fa-

ther, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' <sup>31</sup> And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.' " (Luke 15:17-24)

## **Introduction**

Philip Griffin said in one of his sermons:

I saw a sign once that I love – a lost dog sign. There was a big cash reward for whoever found the lost dog, and a description of the dog. It said: "He's only got three legs, he's blind in the left eye, he's missing a right ear, his tail has been broken off, he was neutered accidentally by a fence – ouch! – he's almost deaf, and he answers by the name 'Lucky.' "

That dog isn't lucky! He's been through a whole lot of mess. But he's lucky because he's got an owner who loves him and wants him back. That's what redemption is all about!<sup>3</sup>

The parable of the lost son is a dramatic illustration of the love of a father for his son, and wants him back. He allows his son to reject his love. The younger son rejects his father's love, rebels against him, asks for his share of the inheritance, goes off to a far country, and then loses everything. But the father never stops loving his son, and looking for him to return home.

## **Lesson**

The parable of the gracious father in Luke 15:17-24 shows us the amazing grace of God.

---

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/december/7122611.html>.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Younger Son's Plan (15:17-19)
2. The Father's Welcome (15:20-24)

## I. The Younger Son's Plan (15:17-19)

First, let's look at the younger son's plan.

The younger son had squandered his inheritance in a far country. He tried to find work, but could not find anything that would allow him to feed himself properly. Worse yet, Jesus said that no one gave him anything (Luke 15:16).

He did not want to go home because his relationship with his father (and brother and community) was broken. Moreover, he knew that a *kezazah* ceremony awaited him should he return back to the village. The *kezazah* ceremony was a cutting off ceremony in which any Jewish son who lost his family inheritance in Gentile territory was cut off from the Jewish community. Kenneth E. Bailey describes the ceremony:

The ceremony itself was simple. Fellow villagers would fill a large earthenware pot with burned nuts and burned corn and break it in front of the guilty individual. While doing this, they would shout, "So-and-so is cut off from his people." From that point on, the village would have nothing to do with the hapless lad.<sup>4</sup>

So, the younger son was in a desperate situation. His first plan to find a job and feed himself did not work.

Eventually, the younger son was so hungry that he came up with another plan. Jesus said in verses 17-19, "**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! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say**

---

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 102.

**to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.” ’ ’ ”**

The first thing I want you to notice is that the younger son, Jesus said, **came to himself** (15:17a). Bailey notes, “The phrase ‘he came to himself’ is often interpreted as meaning ‘he repented.’ ”<sup>5</sup> But, as Bailey rightly points out, “When understood in this fashion, the text loses its cutting edge, and the theological unity of the chapter is broken.”<sup>6</sup> Remember that Jesus is telling *one* parable in Luke 15 that has *three* parts. The first part is about the lost sheep, the second part is about the lost coin, and the third part is about the lost son. In the first part, the shepherd goes into the wilderness to look for the lost sheep. In the second part, the woman sweeps her entire house to look for the lost coin. The sheep and the coin are both *found*. They did nothing to initiate their recovery; it was entirely the work of the owner. Now, if in the third part of the parable the son initiates the action, then the theological unity of the entire parable is broken. If the younger son repents and makes his way home by his own efforts, then the third part of the parable is exactly opposite to the first and second part of the parable.

Now, some observant student may say that in both the first and second part of the parable Jesus said that heaven rejoices over a lost sinner who is found. And then he described the lost sinner as one who repents. But that is exactly the point of repentance in both the first and second part of the parable. Jesus defined repentance as “acceptance of being found.”

So, if the lost son *first* repents and *then* returns home, the parable is destroyed theologically. This is, of course, the Pelagian heresy. Pelagius was a fifth-century British monk who argued that people are able to do God’s will and return to him unaided. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, opposed

---

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal*, 104.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal*, 104.

Pelagius and insisted that people are incapable of returning to God unaided. He argued that God sent Jesus to seek and to save the lost (19:10). And he also sent the Holy Spirit to enable lost sinners to respond in repentance and faith.

So, what is going on in the third part of the parable? Rather than repent, the younger son devised a plan to earn his way back into his father's life. The younger son's plan was to go back to his father and work for him as one of his **hired servants**. **Hired servants** lived outside the community and came in daily to work for his father. So, the younger son wanted to be hired by his father so that he could earn the money that he had lost. The younger son knew that the community would cut him off, but if somehow he could convince his father to hire him, then he would feed himself and perhaps earn enough money to pay off the inheritance money that he had lost.

Notice the younger son's speech that he planned to give to his father. He said in verses 18b-19, "**Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.**" The first part of the speech in verse 18b, "**Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,**" is often seen as heartfelt repentance. But, remember that Jesus' audience comprised the Pharisees and the scribes, and they knew the Scriptures very well. They would have recalled that Pharaoh used almost identical language when he tried to manipulate Moses into stopping the plagues. After the ninth plague, Pharaoh finally agreed to meet Moses. When Moses appeared, Pharaoh's opening statement to Moses was, "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you" (Exodus 10:16). Everyone knew that Pharaoh was not repenting. He was simply trying to manipulate Moses into doing what he (Pharaoh) wanted.

The younger son was planning to do exactly the same thing in his speech to his father. He was not repenting; he was bargaining. The younger son thought that if he softened his fa-

ther's heart with his apologetic statement, he could present his plan to be treated **as one of his father's hired servants**. Initially, the younger son would not live at home. He would work to repay his lost inheritance. As Bailey said, "*He will yet save himself by keeping the law. Grace is unnecessary.*"<sup>7</sup>

Of course, we do that too, don't we? When our relationship with God is broken and we come to our senses, we think of what we can present to God to earn his favor. We believe God will accept us if we go to worship, read the Bible, spend time in prayer, give money to the church, serve on a ministry team, go on a missions trip, serve our spouse (or parents or children), or any number of other activities. "God, I have sinned against you," we say, "but from now on I am going to keep your law and earn your favor." Friends, that is salvation by works. It is not salvation by grace. It will not get you to heaven.

## II. The Father's Welcome (15:20-24)

And second, let's look at the father's welcome. The father does two main things.

### A. He Receives His Son (15:20-22)

First, the father receives his son.

Jesus said that the younger son **arose and came to his father** (15:20a). I am sure that the *kezazah* ceremony weighed heavily on his mind. But, he was desperately hungry. And so he kept going, not knowing what kind of reception he would get.

Clearly, the father had been looking for his son. He knew that his son would fail. He knew that he would eventually return home. And he also knew that the *kezazah* ceremony awaited his son. But he knew that if he were to get to his son before any of the villagers, and publically receive him and wel-

---

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal*, 106–107.



come him, then no one in the village would treat his son badly. If the community witnessed the reconciliation, then no *kezazah* ceremony would be enacted. But, in order to achieve that goal, self-emptying humiliation would be required of the father. And so Jesus said that **while** the younger son **was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him** (15:20b).

Here is another instance in which the father broke Middle Eastern tradition. In that culture, an older man *never* ran. That was profoundly humiliating in that culture. Servants ran, but older men *never* ran. But the father humbled himself by running toward his son. He did so because he **felt compassion** for his son, and also because he wanted to deflect the attention of the community away from his filthy younger son to himself. The father took the initiative to go and welcome his unworthy son into the embrace of his self-humiliating love. Bishop J. C. Ryle writes, “Let it be noted that the father does not say a single word to his son about his profligacy and wickedness. There is neither rebuke nor reproof for the past, nor galling admonitions for the present, nor irritating advice for the future. The one idea that is represented as filling his mind, is joy that his son has come home.”<sup>8</sup>

How encouraging this is to any lost sinner. No matter how far we have wandered into the far country of sin, God welcomes sinners to himself.

The younger **son said to** his father, “**Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son**” (15:21). Notice that the third part of the younger son’s prepared statement – “**Treat me as one of your hired servants**” – is missing. Some people say that the father interrupted his son before he could say it. But he did not interrupt his son. Instead, the younger son changed his mind

---

<sup>8</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 187–188.

because he was overwhelmed by his father's love and grace *already* demonstrated him to him. It is at this point that the younger son repented. The father took the initiative to repair the broken relationship, and so it would be foolish for the younger son to try and earn the father's acceptance as *he already it!* You see, the father did not demonstrate grace in response to his son's repentance. No, the son demonstrated repentance in response to his father's grace. Like the first and second part of the parable, the son finally comes to *acceptance of being found*.

So, **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"** (15:22). The **best robe** replaced the son's rags. It showed that he belonged to his father. The **ring** demonstrated his authority as a son. And the **shoes** told everyone that he was a son. Only sons wore shoes, slaves did not.

You see, the son had nothing to bring to the father. But the father lavished grace upon the son. What a picture of our own spiritual condition. As Augustus Toplady said in his hymn "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me": "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling; / naked, come to for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace." That is how we all come to God for salvation.

*B. He Celebrates His Son (15:23-24)*

And second, the father celebrates his son.

The father also said, **"And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate** (15:23-24). The younger son has accepted being found and dropped his plan to earn his father's favor. Instead, in response to the father's love and grace, he has repented and reconciled the relationship with his father. And this is cause for celebration!

It is significant that the father did not say, “He was lost, *and has come home.*” Instead, the father said, “**He was lost, and is found.**” Someone had to find the lost son. And it was the father who did so by humiliating himself and welcoming his son home. From the father’s perspective, his son was still lost and **dead** at the edge of the village. The community was ready to cut off the younger son forever from them. But just as the shepherd paid a high price to find his lost sheep, and the woman sought diligently to find her lost coin, the father raced to the edge of the village and in a humbling demonstration of unexpected love found and resurrected his son. The banquet was not a celebration of the son’s repentance but a celebration of the father’s costly efforts to save his son.

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the gracious father in Luke 15:17-24, we should receive God’s grace and repent of our sin.

Ernest Hemingway wrote a story about a father and his teenage son. In the story, the relationship had become somewhat strained, and the teenage son ran away from home. His father began a journey in search of that rebellious son.

Finally, in Madrid, Spain, in a last desperate attempt to find the boy, the father put an ad in the local newspaper. The ad read: “Dear Paco: Meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father.”

The next day, in front of the newspaper office, eight hundred Pacos showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness. They were all seeking the love of their father.<sup>9</sup>

Friends, God is compassionate and full of grace. He loves you and invites you to receive his grace and love and forgiveness today. Amen.

---

<sup>9</sup> George Munzing, “Living a Life of Integrity,” *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 32.



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz)

## **Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)**

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for the exquisite parable of Jesus in Luke 15 about the father and two sons. Thank you for the amazing grace of the father demonstrated toward his lost and wayward son.

O God, would you assure each one here today of your compassion and love and grace. Help each one of us to know that you are far more willing to receive sinners than we are willing to repent. Thank you for all that you have done in self-humiliating love in Jesus to die for our sins so that we can be reconciled to you.

If there is anyone here today who is still lost, will you grant that person faith and repentance? Will you save that lost person?

And will you enable all of us who are no longer lost to tell others about Jesus and the salvation that can be found only in him. And may we rejoice with all heaven at the salvation of every lost person.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!