

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Parable of the Lost Son – Part 3

Luke 15:25-32

Rev. Freddy Fritz

April 5, 2015

The Parable of the Lost Son – Part 3

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. Previously 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. Then we saw how the father welcomed home the younger son with amazing grace and love. That is what most people know about this parable. But the most important part of the parable is really how the story ends: with the self-righteous older son refusing to share in his father's welcome.

Jesus was teaching this parable to religious leaders. They were incensed that Jesus would associate with irreligious sinners, even eating with them. So Jesus told them a three-part story about a lost sheep (15:3-7), a lost coin (15:8-10), and a lost son (15:11-32). In each case, the seeker rejoiced in finding what was lost, and then celebrated that joy with friends.

Jesus told this triple parable because, 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)."¹ 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

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

over the salvation of the outcasts.”²

Let’s read the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32, although our text for today is Luke 15:25-32:

¹¹And he said, “There was a man who had two sons.
¹²And 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. ¹³Not 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. ¹⁴And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶And 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! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰And 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. ²¹And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²But 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. ²³And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵**“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷And 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.’ ²⁸But he was**

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

angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹but he answered his father, '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. ³⁰But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.' " (Luke 15:25-32)

Introduction

Rabbit Proof Fence is an Australian film telling the true story of three Aboriginal girls removed from their home in Jigalong, Western Australia, in 1931. Sisters Molly and Daisy, along with their cousin Gracie were "half-castes," children of white fathers and Aboriginal mothers. The Aborigine Act of the day allowed the removal of half-caste children from anywhere in the state to place them in residential schools. The fairer skinned ones would be educated and married off to white husbands. The grandchildren of these unions would be seen as white, eliminating this unwanted third race.

These three girls were literally ripped from their mother and grandmother's arms and transported by truck and train, sometimes caged, to the school at Moore River. Here they were placed in a dorm with dozens of other half-caste girls and began to experience the regimented prison-camp-like conditions of the school. Half-castes who tried to escape were caught by the Aboriginal tracker Moodoo and punished severely.

One day, with a storm on the horizon, Molly decides to run away with her sister and cousin, hoping that the rain will obscure their tracks. The girls must not only evade capture but find the resources and directions needed to return home. A key

to their success is the rabbit proof fence, a 1500-mile structure, the longest fence in the world, built to keep the plague of rabbits separated from good farmland. One line of the fence runs right through Jigalong, the girls' home. Upon finding the fence they follow it doggedly, trying to elude the tracker, police, and others who have been enlisted to catch them. Gracie is captured and returned to Moore River. The two sisters continue on for several more weeks through desolate wilderness and into a desert where they nearly perish. Following the fence, they are joyfully reunited with their mother and grandmother, who take them to hide in the desert.

In their amazing journey home, the girls walked for nine weeks and covered approximately 1200 miles. Incredibly, years later Molly was again taken to Moore River, this time with her own children. Again she escaped and made the same journey home while carrying a baby. The movie closes with a shot of Daisy and Molly, now very old women, still at Jigalong, vowing never to leave home again.³

We will do almost anything, suffer almost any hardship, travel almost any distance, to get where we all eventually want to be: home. We love the security of the relationships at home.

But sometimes the relationships at home are fractured. There is no real, warm, loving relationship. That is really what is going on with the older son and his father in this parable. Oh, to be sure, the older son has been living at home. He seems to be the good son in the story. He has been earning his father's favor by obeying the rules. But, he is just as lost as his brother.

Lesson

The analysis of the lost older son in Luke 15:25-32 teaches us about the danger of moral conformity.

³ *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Australian Film Commission, 2002), based on the book by Doris Pilkington.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Older Son's Absence (15:25)
2. The Older Son's Anger (15:26-28a)
3. The Father's Appeal (15:28b)
4. The Older Son's Answer (15:29-30)
5. The Father's Assertion (15:31-32)

I. The Older Son's Absence (15:25)

First, let's look at the older son's absence.

The younger son had left home with one-third of the family inheritance. He had gone to a far country – Gentile country – and squandered the entire inheritance in reckless living. He finally returned home because he was starving. He was hoping that his father would allow him to work for him as one of his hired servants. Astonishingly, when his father saw him at the edge of the village, he ran to his younger son and welcomed him home. The younger son was so surprised by his father's amazing grace toward him that he repented. His father demonstrated his welcome to his younger son by giving him his best robe, a ring, and shoes – all signs of acceptance and restoration. He also ordered the fattened calf to be slaughtered so that the entire village could celebrate with him the return home of his younger son.

Then Jesus said in verse 25, **“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.”** The **older son** was presumably tending to the family business **in the field** when his younger brother came home. So, he was oblivious to what had just transpired at home between his father and his younger brother.

II. The Older Son's Anger (15:26-28a)

Second, notice the older son's anger.

So the older son **called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 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”** (15:26-27). At this point the older son should have been elated. His younger brother had returned home! His father was rejoicing! In fact, the entire village was rejoicing with his father! And the older son should have immediately rushed in to the house to join in the celebration.

“But,” said Jesus, **“he was angry and refused to go in”** (15:28a). Why was the older son angry? The older son was angry because the younger son had been accepted into a relationship with the father. The father had welcomed the younger son, forgiven him, and was even eating with him. Kenneth E. Bailey said, “This is why the older son is angry. Indeed, he is *so* angry he takes the radical step of breaking his relationship with his father. For a son to be present and refuse participation in such a banquet is an unspeakable public insult to the father.”⁴

III. The Father’s Appeal (15:28b)

Third, observe the father’s appeal.

Jesus said in verse 28b, **“His father came out and entreated him.”** Yet again the father breaks the code of behavior for a Middle Eastern patriarch. And for the second time on that same day the father offers what Kenneth E. Bailey calls “a *costly demonstration of unexpected love*. Only now it is offered to a law-keeper rather than a law-breaker. Amazing grace holds true for both sons.”⁵ Culturally, the father was not expected to go out to his older son but to continue with the celebration and ignore the public insult. He would deal with the older son later.

⁴ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 114.

⁵ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal*, 115.

But that is not what the father did. Like he did with the younger son, he publically humbled himself to go to his older son and find yet another lost son.

IV. The Older Son's Answer (15:29-30)

Fourth, look at the older son's answer.

But the older son answered his father, "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. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!" (15:29-30).

The younger son was overwhelmed by the costly love freely offered to him by his father. He responded to his father's gracious love in repentance and reconciliation.

By contrast, the older son did not respond to his father's gracious and loving offer. You see, the older son had served his father many years and never disobeyed his command. But, he did not do so because he loved his father. As Tim Keller said, "Elder brothers obey God to get things. They don't obey God to get God himself – in order to resemble him, love him, know him, and delight him."⁶

Elisabeth Elliot tells a fictitious story about Jesus that shows the difference between a relationship born of self-interest and relationship born of love:

One day Jesus said to his disciples: "I'd like you to carry a stone for Me." He didn't give any explanation. So the disciples looked around for a stone to carry, and Peter, being the practical sort, sought out the smallest stone he could possibly find. After all, Jesus didn't give any regulations for weight and size! So he put it in his pocket. Jesus then said: "Follow Me." He led

⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (Penguin Group US. Kindle Edition), 42-43.

them on a journey. About noontime Jesus had everyone sit down. He waved his hands and all the stones turned to bread. He said, "Now it's time for lunch." In a few seconds, Peter's lunch was over. When lunch was done Jesus told them to stand up. He said again, "I'd like you to carry a stone for Me." This time Peter said, "Aha! Now I get it!" So he looked around and saw a small boulder. He hoisted it on his back and it was painful, it made him stagger. But he said, "I can't wait for supper." Jesus then said: "Follow Me." He led them on a journey, with Peter barely being able to keep up. Around supper time Jesus led them to the side of a river. He said, "Now everyone throw your stones into the water." They did. Then he said, "Follow Me," and began to walk. Peter and the others looked at him dumbfounded. Jesus sighed and said, "Don't you remember what I asked you to do? Who were you carrying the stone for?"⁷

All these years the older son had been serving his father for what he could get from him. He did not serve him because he loved his father.

Many people today do the same thing. We go to church and read our Bible and pray and give money and serve because we want God to take us to heaven when we die. We love God in order to earn his favor.

But that is not how it works. We love because he first loved us. We serve God not for what we can get from him but rather because we love him. It is that simple.

V. The Father's Assertion (15:31-32)

And fifth, notice the father's assertion.

The father **said to** his older son, "**Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found**" (15:31-32).

⁷ Elisabeth Elliot, *These Strange Ashes* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1975), 132.

What more could the father say to his older son? Philip Ryken said:

Everything that belonged to his father belonged to him. He had it all, every day: the best robe in the house, the ring of inheritance, the shoes of sonship. Even the fatted calf was his to enjoy, if only he would come and sit down for dinner. But more than any of that, he had a son's greatest blessing, which was his father's love. He was always with his father. So rather than thinking about how much this would cost him, the elder brother should have been thinking about how much he already had: the father-son relationship that was his to enjoy every day of his life.⁸

Jesus did not end the parable. He did not tell the Pharisees how the older son responded. Kenneth Bailey suggests that Jesus would love to have been able to say, "And he came and entered the house and joined in the music and dancing and he began to make merry. And the two sons were reconciled to their father."⁹

But Jesus did not say that. That was intentional. Jesus wanted them – and all of us too – to consider how to respond to the invitation to join the banquet.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the lost older son in Luke 15:25-32, we should receive God's grace and repent of our sin.

Philip Ryken says in his commentary on this passage:

⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 164.

⁹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Combined Edition., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 191.

Like the [younger] son, some of us are law-breakers; we like to wander in the far country of sin. Others are more like the elder brother; we pride ourselves on keeping the law, even though our hearts may be just as far from the Father's love. I am both of those kinds of sinners, and maybe you are too. I am the selfish son who wants to go off and sin; I am also the stingy brother who prides myself on doing my duty. But there is grace for me in the Father's love. Everything that belongs to him now belongs to me through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

That is the story of Easter. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He lived and died to reconcile us to the Father. The Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice because he raised him back to life on that first Easter Sunday morning.

God invites law-breakers like the younger son and law-keepers like the older brother to join him in the banquet. He offers you grace and love and mercy and forgiveness. You do not have to do anything to earn or merit his grace.

Simply respond to his grace and love and mercy and forgiveness by believing that Jesus paid the penalty for all your sin. Do so this Easter, and your life will be changed for all eternity. Amen.

¹⁰ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 165.

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
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred dyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred%20dyFritz)

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

Web site: 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 both of his sons.

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!