

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON (Part One) // Luke 15:11-16

Message from the series, Lost and Found

The three parables in Luke 15 are stories about lostness. While the first two, the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin, examine lostness from God's perspective, the third, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, looks at lostness from a human perspective. This parable can be divided into three parts: a sad son (v. 11-16), a glad father (v. 17-24), and a mad brother (v. 25-32). Although the story is often titled after the younger son, and although the older son represents the Pharisees, whom Jesus intended to rebuke with the story, neither son is the main character. The central figure in the parable is the father. He is a representation of God, our heavenly Father. Through the course of the parable, we will see the father respond to two key actions by the younger son.

1. The demand of the son (v. 11-12)

The parable opens by indicating that the father has two sons. Both are lost—the younger is irreligious and reckless, the older is religious but also hates his father. Only the father is morally upright. The younger son's demand for his inheritance is unimaginably disrespectful. He is, in effect, wishing for his father's death. The two Greek words used for "property" in verse 12 indicate what the son is asking for and what the father is giving—the *ousia*, the monetary value of the estate, and the *bios*, the life or livelihood the property brought to the family. This son has no interest in working with the father to maintain the property, which could have been an arrangement of his early inheritance. Instead, he liquidates it, caring only to get cash as quickly as possible.

2. The departure of the son (v. 13-16)

The departure of this Jewish son into a far (Gentile) country, is an indication that he wants to escape any oversight, to squander the money without any accountability. Notably, the older brother leaves him to it—the fact that he doesn't go after him demonstrating that he hates his brother and is happy he's gone. When the famine strikes, the younger son has hit rock bottom—not because of the famine, but because of all the mistakes prior to that point: shaming his father, selling his property, distancing himself from his family, and blowing his money on sinful indulgences. Instead of going home right then, he makes another mistake: he refuses to repent and instead hires himself out to a "citizen" a term indicating this Gentile's elevated social status. The son has become a leech, giving up his own personhood, basically prostituting himself, willing to do anything to survive—not only feeding the pigs, but even envying them their slops. He has reached the lowest of lows.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does this parable in particular reflect a human view of lostness, in contrast to the stories about the lost sheep and lost coin?
2. The father meets the son's demands—what does this indicate about his character? Since he is a depiction of God, how would it be a reflection of God's character?
3. Have you been at a low point in your life? What led you there? How were you brought out?