

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON (Part Two) // Luke 15:17-24

Message from the series, Lost and Found

In a chapter focused on parables about the lost and the found, this parable of the lost son serves as an exclamation point to the thesis of the gospel of Luke: Jesus came to seek and to save the lost! (Luke 19: 10) While the first section of the parable focused on the sad son (v. 11-16) and the last third focuses on the mad brother (v. 25-32), this section focuses on the glad dad. The lost son repents and returns—how will the father receive him? What kind of father is he? As the parable demonstrates, he is a father like our heavenly Father. The story shows us how God responds to those who repent and turn to him.

SIGNPOSTS OF REPENTANCE

1. A conviction of the Holy Spirit (v. 17) Although the Holy Spirit is not explicitly named in this verse, a theological argument can be made that this kind of repentance is only accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. The son has turned 180 degrees in his attitude. What he formerly longed for he now despises; what he once despised he now longs for. His attention has been turned to his father, and he longs to be in his father's house—this can only be done by the Holy Spirit. We should pray that God would get hold of the people we are praying for in this way, that he will do for them what they could not do for themselves.

2. A confession of the son (v. 18-19) True repentance is always accompanied by action—in this case, by confession, specifically vertical confession. Paul writes about “godly grief” that “produces repentance leading to salvation” contrasted with “worldly grief” which only produces death (2 Cor. 7: 10). It is one thing to be grieved that you were caught or that someone got hurt; it is another to have godly sorrow, to acknowledge that you have sinned against heaven, as the lost son says. He recognizes that he has grieved the heart of God.

3. The compassion of the father (v. 20) The father sees the son coming from a long way off, and he feels compassion, or *splagchnizomai*, the same word used to describe how Jesus felt seeing the 5,000 that he would feed (Matt. 14: 14). It is a deep reaction, felt in the body, in the gut. This should be the same feeling that prompts us in our missionary and evangelistic endeavors—compassion for the lost.

The father responds to the son's appearance by running to meet him, a sight that would have been astonishing, as it was not something done by men in that culture. It would have seemed undignified, but this father doesn't care—he is willing to humiliate himself in his joy over finding his son has come home. We should see at the same time how Jesus was humiliated, hanging naked on a cross. He was willing to take on that indignity in order to save the lost.

4. The confirmation of the relationship (v. 21-22) In bringing out the robe and ring and shoes, the father is not just supplying the son's need, he is giving him the best of everything, just as God has “blessed us in Christ in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1: 3). We also have been given new shoes (Eph. 6: 15) and a new robe, but not of fabric—we have been robed in the righteousness of Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life, but died as though he lived our life. A sinless man died a sinner's death so that sinful man could have a sinless man's life.

5. The celebration of the family (v. 23-24) The father says “let us eat and celebrate”—who is “us”? The implication is that this is, at least initially, an intimate celebration—just the father and the son. God sees *you*—not you and your spouse, you and your family, you and your church. You have his undivided attention.

By the end of verse 24, the private celebration has become a more public celebration—everyone is brought in. The father's acceptance of the son leads to the others accepting the son. His joy leads to their joy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When did you experience the conviction of the Holy Spirit? What happened in your life as a result? Can you pray that someone you know will receive a similar conviction?
2. Are we moved by compassion for the lost? How does this parable reveal the heart of God for sinners?
3. In what way has God not only supplied your need but given you “the best of everything”?