

## The Prodigal Sons

### Luke 15

There is more than one way to become **lost**.

The sheep became distracted and separated from the flock and was left behind, the coin got mislaid and buried among the clutter of other stuff, the younger son chose to leave home and adopt an immoral lifestyle and the older brother refused to join the party.

Someone reared in church can become enamoured with other things and stop attending worship or reading God's Word. Before long they're like a sheep in the wilderness, stuck in a bog or caught in a thicket. Others perhaps didn't feel valued. Other people and things always seemed more important than them and like the coin, they gradually sank, discouraged to the bottom of the pile. Some are just blatantly rebellious, others proud and self-righteous. In numerous, often subtle ways, the enemy leads us into sin and distance from God. However we start out, we all end up lost.

Observe these two brothers.

The younger appears quite openly contemptuous of his father and the home and values with which he was reared. He yearns for adventure and thinks nothing of giving away his inheritance to gratify his appetite for pleasure. Only when he's crashed and broken, bitterly disappointed and shamed in the far country does he think of home and his dad. The older son seems content to stay put and work what's left of the family farm knowing it will one day be his. But time drags slowly, little frustrations grow into a deep well of silent resentment. He doesn't squander the family fortune on prostitutes but he nevertheless becomes cold, critical and distant in his heart.

Both of these men are actually far away from enjoying the love of their father.

There are many ways to become lost but lost we all are. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's glorious intention in various ways. We all need the justification and redemption of God's grace through Jesus.

Two constant factors in all three of these parables are firstly, the **value** placed on these lost things by the shepherd, the woman and the father. They are all precious, dearly loved and sadly missed. Secondly, in each case there is tremendous celebration and **rejoicing** when what was lost is found and restored. The angels rejoice according to Jesus over every sinner who repents but no one rejoices more than our Father in heaven.

No one grieves more than God when the beloved people He created in His image rebel and lose themselves in sin and sorrow. And no one celebrates more joyfully than the heavenly Father when He can welcome His children home!

Observe here the deep, restoring **love** of the father. He doesn't care what the neighbours think, he casts aside dignity and runs out to welcome his child. The very real *grief* caused by this son's scandalous behaviour is eclipsed by *compassion*. Forgiveness is not stated like a formal court sentence but demonstrated in dramatic generosity. The young man has no shoes and only the few rags he's wearing. He has been living as a slave. Quick! orders the father, bring the best robe and sandals and a ring, the signs of sonship and belonging. Let this young man and the whole world know he is my beloved child!

This is so encouraging! We may feel we have wandered too far, sunk too deep, sinned too badly to hope for restoration but this is God and His grace is amazing! We ought to be punished. We don't deserve to be forgiven. He doesn't turn a blind eye or pretend sin doesn't matter. He sees all but when we repent and trust in Christ He chooses not to hold it against us, instead releases us from its penalty and showers us with His kindness, welcoming us as His children!

This is wonderful but if we stop here we're missing the original point Jesus was making with these particular parables. Note the context at the beginning of the chapter. Some Pharisees and teachers of the law were complaining that Jesus seemed way too friendly with tax collectors and people who had been found guilty of scandalous sins. *They* wouldn't associate with such people. And suddenly the parable becomes less the story of the rebellious son but instead the story of the unforgiving brother!

Yes, God's people must uphold God's standards and urge others to do the same but we must also show compassion to people, even those who have got themselves into a pigsty of sin! Jesus is challenging these Pharisees and all religious people to share His Father's heart in His desire to forgive and restore people who have made a mess of things.

And so the story doesn't end with the welcome home party for the one who had been so obviously 'lost' in wild living and is now 'found' but with the father going out to the field to plead with the older son who is still 'lost' in a different way through hurt pride and resentment.

Think for a moment of the incident in John 8 where Jesus challenges an angry mob who want to stone someone caught in a serious sin with these words, 'Let him who has no sin cast the first stone.' None of them could do it. None of us could either. The bottom line is we all need grace and forgiveness so we should be willing to show these things to others.

Think of Jesus' words to the accused on that occasion, 'I don't condemn you... go and leave your life of sin.' That's the balance for which the Church and individual Christians must strive. We must never stop opposing sin in all its forms. Sin is bad, it leads to trouble and sorrow now, always and forever.

The world can be very deceptive. It frequently calls evil things good and good things evil and like the prophets in the Bible we must be prepared to question such twisted logic where we find it. However we must also never stop *loving people* because our Master gave His life on the cross for people, people who have sinned in one way or another, people like you and me.

So we must offer welcome and hospitality.

We must declare the Good News of grace.

And we must urge everyone to repent, to change their ways and trust in Jesus.

One amazing closing thought : every time someone does turn from sin to follow Jesus the angels in heaven and the Lord Almighty Himself break into joyful celebration! May that be so today!