

Series: ***The Parables of Jesus***

The Parable of the Two Sons

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32 (ESV)

11 *And he said, "There was a man who had two sons.*

12 *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.*

13 *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.*

14 *And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.*

15 *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.*

16 *And 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!*

18 *I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.*

19 *I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.*

20 *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.*

21 *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.*

22 *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.*

23 *And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.*

24 *For 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.*

26 *And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.*

27 *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.*

28 *But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,*

29 *but 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.*

30 *But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!*

31 *And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.*

32 *It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.*

The Prodigal Son

This parable has traditionally been called the parable of the prodigal son. The word prodigal does not appear in the parable, but most Bibles will include this word as a heading for this portion of Scripture.

The word prodigal comes from the Latin root *prodigus* which means ‘lavish.’ The meaning of prodigal that has come down to us is ‘spending money or resources in recklessly lavish way; to be wastefully extravagant.’¹

The Parable of the Two Sons

If the parable has so long been called the Parable of the Prodigal Son, then why call it ‘The Parable of the Two Sons?’ The simple reason is that calling this parable ‘the Parable of the Prodigal Son’ overlooks the fact that this parable is about two sons, not just one.

Context: One Truth In Three Parables

That this is about both sons can be seen from the opening sentence to the closing scene. Verse 11 says, “*There was a man who had two sons.*” The first sentence points our attention to two sons. The man has a younger son, who is the prodigal, and an older son. The concluding scene of this parable takes place between the father and the older son. This parable is told in 21 verses. Fourteen verses are dedicated to the younger son and seven to the older. The final third of this parable is dedicated to the older son. So this parable is about both sons, not just the younger one.

This parable is the third of three parables that Jesus tells in Luke chapter 15. The first is the parable of the lost sheep, the second is the parable of the lost coin, and this parable is the third. All three parables focus on the joy that comes from finding something that was lost.

Jesus tells these parables after being criticized by the Pharisees. Look at the first verse in the chapter.

The Accusation: You Receive Sinners & Eat With Them

Luke 15:1

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

It is in response to **this** accusation that Jesus tells these three parables. The Pharisees were grumbling and complaining that Jesus was ‘receiving sinners and eating with them.’ They were complaining about this when they should have been rejoicing! If their self-righteous malice was allowed to go unchecked, it might inhibit more sinners from coming to Jesus. *So in order to illustrate that God does in fact receive repentant sinners and that joyful celebration is the proper response to such repentance, Jesus tells these three parables.*

100: 1, 10:1, 0:2

Jesus brilliantly and progressively intensifies the effect as each parable is told. Jesus begins by telling the parable of the lost sheep. A man had 100 sheep. One is lost, so he leaves the 99 and goes to find the one that was lost. When he finds it he rejoices and invites his friends and neighbors to join him in celebration.

¹ Apple Electronic Dictionary, ver. 2.1.1, 2009.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:7

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jesus then tells the story of a woman who had 10 coins. One is lost and so she searches and searches throughout her whole house until she finds it. And when she does she invites all her friends and neighbors to join her in the celebration saying,

The Parable of the Lost Coin

Luke 15:9b-10

'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ *"Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

Then Jesus, on His way to Jerusalem to die, tells this third parable. In this parable, we have a father who finds a lost son and also invites friends and neighbors to join him in celebration. However, Jesus throws in a twist. The father's older son refuses to join the celebration, thus revealing his situation is not what we might immediately have assumed.

In the first parable, there was one out of hundred that was lost. In the second there was one out of ten that was lost. Now Jesus tells a story of a father with two sons. And we will see that **both** are lost, not just one. Perhaps a better title would be, '**The Parable of the Lost Sons.**'

Charles Dickens and Ralph Waldo Emerson both said this was the greatest short story ever written.² This story has been the object of countless books. And literally dozens of musicians and bands have written songs based upon this story, including the Rolling Stones, Iron Maiden, Kid Rock, Billy Idol, Hank Williams, U2, and many other Christian artists (Keith Green, Benny Hester, Casting Crowns, Sonic Flood, BarlowGirl, Amy Grant, etc.). *There is something amazing about this little story that has a profound and enduring effect down to this day.*

Luke 15:11-12

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 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.

The younger son comes to his father and gives a *command*. His manner is completely disrespectful. He does not ask, he *tells* his father what he is to do. He commands his father, "Dad, give me my share of the farm that is coming to me."

What is he wanting? He is wanting the share of the family estate that is 'coming to' him. He is wanting his what would 'coming to him' when the estate property would be divided. He is wanting his inheritance. When do you receive your inheritance? You receive your inheritance only when father dies (see Heb 9:16-17).

² John MacArthur, in sermon "The Tale of Two Sons, Part 1," found at http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/42-201_The-Tale-of-Two-Sons-Part-1.

Dad, I Wish You Were Dead

What he is saying is, “I want my inheritance now!” The effect of this statement is, “Dad, I really wish you were dead so I could get the property that’s coming to me. But your in pretty good health and I’m tired of waiting, so I want you to go ahead and give it to me now.” This is in effect what this son is demanding of his father.

This is unspeakable horrific. The listening crowd would have been stunned speechless upon hearing this. For any son to approach his father and demand this is beyond comprehension. Imagine the effect this would have on your heart if you were to hear these words come out of the mouth of your youngest son? What pain?

He Died That Night

In a pastor in Iran told of a Hebrew Christian physician whose son did the same thing. This young boy wanted his inheritance from his father while his father was still living. Three months later the man died. His wife said, “he died that night!” meaning the night the son asked for the inheritance.³

How would you respond? After the initial hurt I suspect there would be anger. This was the expected response in Middle Eastern culture. The father would have backhanded the boy across the face and driven him out of the house on the spot never to allow him to return.⁴ Yet, this is not how the father responds.

The Fifth Commandment

Keep in mind **the fifth commandment** (Ex 20:12), which states, “Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” If you failed to honor father and mother by being a disobedient and stubborn son, then your days in the land were to be short. According to Dt 21:18-20 disobedient and rebellious sons were to be stoned.

Surprising Mercy

What the father does NOT do is give this kid what he deserves. He deserves to be smacked across the face and driven out of the house, but the father is unbelievable merciful to him. He does not respond to him in anger, but instead he withholds any wrath and demonstrates shocking mercy.

And He Divided His Property Between Them (v.12)

Then the father does the unthinkable. He granted this disrespectful irreverent son’s horrid request! He divides the property between them. **This response is inhumanly gracious.** The father transfers to the ownership of the family estate to his two sons. Notice that they both receive their due portions. According to Dt 21:17 the first born son was to receive a double portion of the inheritance. In this case it means the older son received two-thirds of the estate while the younger received one-third.

Dividing the estate while the father was still living was not unheard of. Sometimes a father would do this to avoid rivalry and disputing after his death. However, according to the Mishna, Jewish law, the land remained under the father’s management and control until he died. The sons did not have

³ Kenneth Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p. 162 footnote 73.

⁴ Ibid.

the right of disposition, i.e. the right to sell the land, until after the father's death.⁵ However, not only did the father divide the property, he also granted his younger son the right of disposition. We see this in the next verse, verse 13.

The Silence of the Older Son

Before we move on, we should note that the older son silently receives his two-thirds. No protest is noted. No attempt to reconcile his father and younger brother is mentioned. ***This is our first hint that all is not well with between the older son and the father.***

Not Many Days Later... He Gathered All He Had (v.13)

Luke 15:13

13 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.

The younger son only takes a few days to liquidate one-third of the property. The sale of land usually took months,⁶ however this son is anxious to sell. He wants to get out of town as fast as he can so he probably sells the land for only a portion of what it was worth. He just wants fast cash to get him out of town and on his way to real life in a distant country.

At this point, we need to pause and be reminded of the Middle Easterners attachment to the land. Their mentality was "The land didn't belong to them, they belonged to the land."⁷ This is still true today. This is why Palestinians refuse to resettle elsewhere.

Consider the care and detail that Joshua went through in allocating each tribe his specific portion. Remember they called it an inheritance (Num 34:2). The Israelites were deeply attached to the land. It was so important to God that each portion of the land remain in its allotted tribe that every 50 years (the year of Jubilee) all land transactions were to revert to their original owners.

Noboth And His Vineyard

Recall Naboth's love for his portion of allotted land (1 Kings 21:1). When the wicked king Ahab offered to buy Naboth's vineyard he replied,

1 Kings 21:3

"The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

Naboth loved his land. He understand his connection to his land. The land had come down to him from his father and his father's fathers who had received it as a direct command from God through Moses and later executed by Joshua. All of His fathers had labored on this portion of land, each improving the fields and the condition of the land so that subsequent generations would benefit from their labor.

Naboth would not sell his land (i.e. his inheritance) for any amount of money. Yet this younger son was ready to part with his portion of the property as quickly as he could. *To so quickly and easily sell*

⁵ *Baba Bathra* viii. 7, quoted in Bailey, p. 163.

⁶ Bailey, p. 169.

⁷ *Ibid.*, footnote 114.

off the family land, would have been the equivalent of denying his family genealogy.⁸ The news of this would have gotten around the village.

The young man's disdain and disrespect for both his father and the land would have been a shock to the community. It would have become painfully evident just how destructively self-serving he truly was. Those in the village would have been quite happy to see him head out of town. Someone would have bought the land, most likely thinking that anyone like this who had no respect for the land did not deserve it anyway.

Journey Into a Far Country (v.13)

So he sells the land quickly, gets his cash, gathers all that he had, and leaves town. Note that he gathers **all that he had**. He packed up everything. He didn't leave his precious childhood memorabilia in the storage shed. He took **all that he had** with him. The picture is he is not planning on coming back. He is saying good bye to this little podunk village for the last time. He's heading off for the real life in the far country.

The Qesasah Ceremony

One cultural ceremony lies in the background of this story. It is the Palestinian ceremony called *Qesasah* (*kezazah*). The word literally means "a cutting off."⁹ This ceremony was performed when a man sold his field to a Gentile or when he married an impure woman. This was a formal ceremony and involved the whole village.

During the ceremony a large clay pot was filled with burnt grain or burnt nuts. The pot was set before the whole village (including children). Someone would then proclaim, "So-and-so is cut off from his inheritance." The pot was then smashed demonstrating that the relationship was broken.

This ceremony is not mentioned in the parable, but it does provide an illuminating backdrop to the communal attitudes that pervaded the culture in which this parable was told. "Family property lost to Gentiles was a serious matter."¹⁰ *If the son leaves town and looses in the land of the Gentiles all the money he made from the sale of the family property, then he will be cut off from the village of his birth. If he wastes all his money, he will have no place to which he can return.*

This journey into a far country is a Gentile country. This young man was ready to get as far away from home as possible. He left the districts of Israel and went into a far away Gentile country. This is quite evident by the job he later finds. He was not living in a Jewish community since he finds a job feeding the pigs.

Squandered All In Reckless Living (v.13)

He squandered all his money on reckless living. He had no thought for the future. He does not bother to think about the consequences of his actions. He spent lavishly and wasted away all that he had through extravagant spending. He assumed everything would continue to be the way it always had been. Yet suddenly the money ran out. He spent every penny he had. Then things get worse.

⁸ Kenneth Bailey in a 4-part lecture give on the prodigal. See <http://www.eprodigals.com/The-Prodigal-Son-About-Us/The-Prodigal-Son-Videos.html>.

⁹ Bailey, p.167.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.168.

A Severe Famine Arose (v.14)

After all the money was gone, a famine came. So not only was he broke, a famine came into the land so that no one was pitching out scraps, and no one was being generous, because food was in short supply leaving him in a desperate situation.

Luke 15:14-16

14 *And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.*

15 *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.*

16 *And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*

The famine is severe. It's no small drought, it is a **severe famine**. There had been severe famine in Israel in the past. When Israel had previously forsaken God and turned away from Him to worship other idols, God often used famine to get their attention and expose their sin. Things became so bad that women ate their own afterbirth (Dt 28:52-57) even their own children (2 Kgs 6:28-29; Lam 2:20; 4:10).

He Began To Be In Need (v.14)

For the first time, **he began to be in need**. He could no longer provide for himself and so he was in desperate need. He had no food and no money to buy food. He decides has to get a job. He can work his way out of this trouble. If he could find a well-paying job, then he could gain back all the money he lost.

He Hired Himself Out (v.15)

So he **'hires himself out'** to a pig farmer. Literally the word means he "glued" himself 'to a citizen of that country. If you have ever travelled abroad, this brings to mind some of the experiences you might have in poorer countries. Almost as soon as you walk onto the street, little kids begin to come up to you and try to carry your bags, or beg. They sometime cling to you. This young man latched on to someone to save his life. And to get rid of him this citizen sends him out into the fields to feed the pigs.

This is the lowest of the low. This was the bottom of the barrel for a Jew. Feeding pigs was unthinkable to the Jewish mind. Death was preferable to this. The rabbi's used to say, "Cursed be the man who would breed swine."¹¹

Longing To Be Fed (v.16)

This young man is so low that he was even **longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate**. Literally the text says, "he was desiring (longing) to be filled."¹² This could mean that was so hungry that he seriously contemplated eating the pigs slop. Or it could mean that he did eat the pig slop but he had so little that even though he ate, *he was never full*. Either way, he thinking about this image causes us all to cringe at the depth of this young man's poverty.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *Luke*, in *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 3, ed. by Leon Morris (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2008) p. 258.

¹² A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Lk 15:16.

I think he did eat the pigs food because of the final phrase of verse 16, **no one gave him anything**. The famine is so severe that human compassion is dried up. NO ONE gave him anything. He had absolutely nothing. 'No one' includes his employer. It appears the only food around is the pig food.

But Then He Came To Himself (v.17)

Luke 15:17-19

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! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.*

This portion has traditionally been understood as indicating repentance. It appears by the phrase 'he came to himself,' that he has finally come to his senses. The only other place this phrase is used in Scripture is in **Acts 12:11**. (You'll recall that Acts was also written by Luke.)

Peter has been led out of prison by an angel. He thinks the whole event is a dream. The angel leads him out into the street and then disappears. Peter is left standing in the cool night air. After standing there for a minute the text says, *"When Peter came to himself he said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod...'"*

The phrase itself does not necessarily connote repentance. In Peter's case It simply meant that he realized that what he was experiencing was real. So the phrase, 'when he came to himself,' used in verse 17 does not necessarily mean repentance. The Greek word *metanoia* ('new mind') is the technical word for repentance and that word is *not* used here. So we need to look further at the context Lets look as his reasoning for going back to dad in verse 17.

Luke 15:17

How many of my father's servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger.

Why does he decided to go back to dad? Is it to reconcile with his father? Does he give any indication that he is sorry for hurting his father by telling him, "I wish you were dead?" No. Nothing about the broken relationship is mentioned. The only reason he gives for wanting to return is to get a job.

He is starving. He is working a job that does not pay. He comes to his senses and remembers his dad pays his employees well, *"they have more than enough bread,"* (v.17) and so he decides to go back to dad and say, *"Treat me as one of your hired servants"* (v.19). In other words, 'Give me a job.' Notice he *is still giving his father commands!* He is still planning to tell his dad what to do. 'Treat me as a hired servant!'

Objections: I Have Sinned & Am Not Worthy

Ah, but you might object, "What about this admission that he has sinned against heaven and against his dad? What about the admission that he is not unworthy to be called a son? That is repentance isn't it?"

Pharaoh's "Repentance"

We hear almost the exact same words on Pharaoh's lips just after the eighth plague (i.e. the plague of locusts, **Ex 10:16-17**). Pharaoh says to Moses, *"I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. 17 Now, therefore, forgive my sin, and ... remove this death from me."*

Pharaoh goes further than the prodigal son and even asks for forgiveness, but is Pharaoh truly repentant or is he just saying what needs to be said in order to get what he wanted, i.e. the plague removed? He wants the plague removed and is not in the least concerned about reconciling his broken relationship with God. Merely saying the words does not indicate true repentance. The mouth had turned, but the heart had not!

It looks like this young man still thinks he can solve his own problems. He thinks he can get a nice job and save his money and work his way back into his father's good graces by repaying the money he has lost. He'll say all the right words to get the job he wants and then he'll begin to repay the money.

The Pharisee's Response

By the way, the Pharisees would have been saying 'amen' about now. They would have seen this as a good plan. Yes, he had sinned. Yes, he was unworthy. And yes, the right thing to do is repay the debt by working hard. Amen, Jesus, keep preaching. Ah, now we see what you're telling these sinners when you're eating with them. OK. Maybe we have missed judged you?

But it is precisely at this point that Jesus throws the curve ball.

To Face the Villagers

The son knew to walk back into the village having lost everything would bring down upon him the scorn of the villagers. They would not throw a party for him. They would know that he had lost everything in the land of the Gentiles. He had wasted the money from selling his inheritance in the land of Gentiles. The villagers would know the truth. The *Qesasah* ceremony could be performed. He could be cut off from the village. Some might even want to be sure he had learned his lesson for having scorned his father and his paternal land.

He Saw Him & Felt Compassion for Him (v.20)

Luke 15:20

20 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.

This truly is amazing. The father sees his son while he is ***a long way off the father saw him and felt compassion.*** The father recognized his son even though he was far away and he felt compassion for him. Compassion means "sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes for others."¹³ The father felt for his son. He saw that he had been suffering and he felt for him. It was obvious he was starving and had come to poverty.

Unbelievably, the father is not furious that he lost all the money. Most assuredly he had known what would happen to the money when he gave it to him. Instead his heart is moved with compassion toward his son and so he went to him. The father's heart went out to his son and then his feet followed.

He Ran To Him :: Old Patriarchs Never Run (v.20)

Jesus says the father ran to the son. This would have never happened in the Middle Eastern culture into which Jesus spoke. Dignified patriarchs never ran. Old men never run. Thursday I was

¹³ Apple Electronic Dictionary, ver. 2.1.1, 2009.

downtown and watched an old man slowly cross the street. I thought at any minute the light would turn and he would be in serious danger, but he made it at the last second. Old men don't run.

Aristotle said, "Great men never run in public.' It was very undignified in Eastern eyes for an elderly man to run."¹⁴ Imagine an old dignified patriarch running down the road, holding up the hem of his robe, as he rushed out to meet the very son who had previously wished him dead. He ran to him, fell on his neck, and kissed him repeatedly. This is an amazing show of compassionate love. In 1662 Rembrandt tried to capture the beauty of this moment.



He Kissed Him Before He Said One Word (v.20)

And he has not ever heard the speech yet. This is what struck me. In my twisted mind as I recalled this parable I had the sequence of events all wrong. I remembered the father seeing the son and running to him. But I had it in my mind that he stopped short and waited to see what this young man would do. The boy then shared his speech and then the father smiled and fell on his neck and kissed him. However, that is not what happened.

The father fell on the boy's neck and kissed him repeatedly before he ever said a single word. The father had no idea of why he's coming back. Maybe he's coming back to ask for more money? Who knows? But what is amazing is that the father pours out his love on this rebellious boy **before** he ever says one word!

This son never dreamed this would happen. It never entered his mind that his dignified father would run to meet

him, embrace his emaciated body, and kiss his pig-stinking cheeks. Never! Only after this unbelievable embrace does the son say anything.

Luke 15:21

21 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.

The speech is identical to what he planned (back in vs. 18-19) to say except for one phrase, 'treat me as one of your hired servants.' He does not give any orders to his father. Some have said the father

¹⁴ Bailey, p. 181.

interrupted the son and didn't let him finish. I do not think so. I think that after this amazing demonstration of love the boy then understands there is nothing he can do to repay his father.

His father welcomed him without any reference to the money! His father is not concerned about the money. He is concerned about their broken relationship. I think this shocking love causes this boy to realize that it would be a complete insult to say, "Hey dad, thanks for the hug, but can you give me a job?" In that moment, the son finally understands all that he has missed by separating himself from his father. Now these words take on an entirely different meaning than they had when he was back in the pig farm planning his speech to get a job.

I Am No Longer Worthy

The son said, "Father, I am no longer worthy to be called your son." And the father says back, "That is true son, but I choose to call you son despite your unworthiness." Then he starts giving commands to the servants who have run along with the father.

Bring a Robe & A Ring (v.22)

Luke 15:22-24

22 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. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to celebrate.

The father then demonstrates his lavish, extravagant, prodigal kind of love. He commands that the servants quickly to go back to the house and bring out to them the best robe, a ring, and a pair of sandals for his feet. Remember they are still outside the village. He wants him dressed appropriately BEFORE he enters town.

Whose would have been the best robe in the house? The father would. The father would have owned the best robe in the house. The father is commanding that the son be dressed in his own robe. The ring means a signet ring which would mean that the father is granting the son legal authority in his house to sign papers and transact business. He also commands that shoes be brought for him.

He Left With Everything & Came Back With Nothing

Remember how he left. When this boy left town he took everything he had with him. He now comes back with absolutely nothing, not even a pair of shoes for his feet. Only slaves went without shoes. The father commands that shoes be brought out to him. The father wants to parade his son back through the village with his robe on, his own ring, and his own sandals on his feet. In this way, the father will demonstrate to the entire village that they have been completely reconciled. The robe will cover his weak pig-stinking body. The robe will 'cover all his sins,' as it were.

In running out to meet the son, the father saved his life and restored him to full fellowship. The visible reconciliation will prevent the son from being mistreated and cut off by the villagers. The father has saved the son.

He also commanded that they kill the fattened calf. He commands that a feast be prepared and he says 'let us celebrate.' Twice the word celebrate is used. In his joy the father throws a party. The son expected scorn from the villagers when he returned and instead he found love from his father.

What is the celebration for? What is it about? What is the father celebrating? He says he is celebrating because,

Luke 15:24

“This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate.”

Who wants to celebrate? The father does. He orders the celebration. And he says he does it because “my son was dead and is alive.” Who brought the son to life from the dead? Did the son bring himself back to life? The father says, “my son was lost and now is found?” Who found the son? Did the son find himself? Or did the father find him? The father did both of these things.

Received As A Son, Not A Servant

No. The father brought the son to life when he ran to the him and fell on his neck and embraced him and kissed him. He demonstrated that he was *accepting him as a son and not a servant*. Remember up until that point the son’s plan was to work off the debt. He wanted to be hired as a servant. Instead the father brought him to life by welcoming him as a son. The son did not find himself. The father ran to him and found him and brought him back to himself.

The father is celebrating because of his own joy in graciously receiving his son. His son has truly come back to him. He has found his son. Now they have a relationship. Now the son truly loves his father. The son was dead so long as he despised his father, but now that the father’s love has overcome the hatred of the son, there can be a true relationship of love. The father has welcomed his son and he is happy. In his joy he orders the celebration. This is a call for rejoicing, singing, dancing, and a feast.

The Older Son

This brings us back again to the older son.

Luke 15:25-26

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

The older son had been out working in the field. As he walked in from field, he heard the music and signing from the party. He did not know what was going on. This probably points to the fact of the relational distance between him and his father. He called to one of the servants who told him what was happening.

Luke 15:27-28a

27 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. 28 But he was angry and refused to go in.

The older son hears that father has safely received his younger brother back and has ordered a party. The response is not joy, but anger and he refuses to go in. He doesn’t even want to be under the same roof as that scoundrel son of his father.

This was a public insult to the father. The father had ordered the celebration, he had invited the village to attend. It is estimated that possibly a hundred guests would have been invited. To kill a calf rather than a goat meant the intention was to invite the whole village. Not to invite the

community would have been an insult to whole community.¹⁵ Thus as the son refused the invitations to come in, he has publicly declared that his father was wrong for holding the celebration and therefore humiliated his father.

Perhaps this would equate today to a son shouting at his father in the middle his sister's wedding reception. Again, for the second time that day, instead of responding in anger, the father goes out to the older son and tries to get him to come in.

Luke 15:28b - 30

28 His father came out and entreated him, 29 but 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. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!

The father goes to the older son and entreats him. He earnestly pleads with him to come inside. But the son answers with deep disrespect, "LOOK!" No term of respect. He doesn't even call him father, he tersely says, "Look!" Let me tell you how it is!

I have served you, (lit. *slaved* for you) all these years... He sees himself as a slave and not a son!!! He is just like the younger brother!

I Never Disobeyed Your Command (v.29)

"I never disobeyed you!" Who believes this? He has disobeyed him that very night. In was in the very act of disobeying him. His dad wanted him to go in to the party and he was flatly refusing. He is so blind that he really thinks he has always obeyed his father. This is amazing.

Then he accuses the father of favoritism. "I have slaved for you all the years, never disobeyed you, and you never even gave me a goat to celebrate with my friends!" Here you are killing the fattened calf for this wicked, disobedient, rebellious, son of yours and you can't even give me a goat to have a party with my friends!!!

His friends are apart from the father too. He doesn't really enjoy being with the father either. He would rather be with his friends than in the house celebrating with his father and all his fathers' friends.

This Son of Yours (v.30)

"This son of yours!" He will not even say, 'my brother!' "This wicked son of yours wasted all your money and you are celebrating his sin!???" You killed the fattened calf 'for him.' The father is not celebrating the sins of the son and what he did. He is celebrating the fact that the son has turned away from his sin and turned to himself.

Luke 15:31-32

31 And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.

Again, the father does not respond in anger to these insults and accusations by the older son. Instead he pleads with his son to join him in joy. He says, "Son, you are always with me and all that is

¹⁵ Bailey, p. 186.

mine is yours.” This older son forgot that he too had already received his right to the inheritance. He could have had a goat anytime he wanted it if he had simply asked his father.

It is right to rejoice when dead people are brought to life. It is right to be glad when lost people are found. Hear the entreating of the father, “Son, can you not rejoice with me that the life of your brother has been saved?” Answer, no he can’t because his own life needs to be saved.

This older brother, just like the younger, had no relationship with the father. The younger expressed openly expressed his hatred for his father, while the older son kept his hidden.

Let us summarize in conclusion:

Sin is seen in this parable as that which separates the sons from their father. The younger was separated from his father in his departure to a distant country. The older son is in his heart distant from his father even though they live under the same roof. Sin is that which will steal everything you have and land you in the pig pen leaving so deep in depravity that you become a pig eating pig’s food.

True **Repentance** happens when the younger son realizes he can not save himself. He cannot work long enough to repay the debt that he owes. All he can do is accept the extravagant love of the father. True repentance is when your heart is happy to be with God the father and unhappy anywhere else.

Grace is seen in the father receiving the younger son back into his arms even after he had wished his father dead. The extravagant grace went even further in providing a robe, a ring, and sandals. Grace is also seen given to the older son as the father overlooks the public insult and goes out to the son and entreats him to come in.

God is seen as a **compassionate father**. A father who seeks the lost in order to find them. In the first parable He is the good shepherd who goes out after the lost sheep and finds it and brings it back. He is seen in the second parable as the good woman who seeks for the lost coin until it is found. And He is seen here as the father who goes out to the lost son and finds him at the edge of the village and brings him in safely to his house.

Sonship - what does it mean to be a son? God invites us to be his children not by working and repaying our debt but simply by accepting His extravagant love.

You Receive Sinners and Eat With Them

Remember the initial charge of the Pharisees against Jesus. “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” Jesus answers them by saying, “Gentlemen, it’s worse than that. I not only receive sinners, I run down the road to grab them and that I might bring them into my house to eat with them! I not only receive sinners I transform them into daughters and sons! I receive them as sick, weak, emaciated, stinky, dead people and I lavish them with embraces and kisses and then I give them my own clothes and they are transformed from lost people into found people. I take sinners and transform them from naked dead people and into joyful sons and daughters who are robed in righteousness. I deck them out in my Father’s finest!

Is 61:10

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;

*my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the **garments of salvation**;
he has covered me with the **robe of righteousness**,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

Conclusion

You Pharisees can join in rejoicing when a lost sheep is found. You can join in the rejoicing when a lost coin is found. Can you not rejoice when a lost soul is found? The Pharisees would not doubt realize that they were the elder brother and just as lost. But would they accept Jesus invitation to be found by him. Would they accept his invitation to receive his extravagant love. Would they rejoice the God was saving sinners? Would they enter into the joy of the master?