

## BIBLE CLASS 19.12.2024 The Son who Returned Home Luke 15:11-32

**Luke 15:11** And he said, A certain man had two sons: <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that fall *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. <sup>13</sup> And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. <sup>15</sup> And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup> And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. <sup>17</sup> And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, <sup>19</sup> And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. <sup>20</sup> And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: <sup>23</sup> And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry: <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. <sup>25</sup> Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. <sup>28</sup> And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. <sup>29</sup> And he answering said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: <sup>30</sup> But as soon as this thy son was come, which

hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. <sup>31</sup> And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. <sup>32</sup> It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:11 KJV)

**Luke 15:11- 32** Yesu akaendelea kusema, "Kulikuwa na mtu mmoja mwenye wana wawili. <sup>12</sup> Yule mdogo, alimwambia baba yake: `Baba, nipe urithi wangu.` Naye akawagawia mali yake. <sup>13</sup> Baada ya siku chache, yule mdogo aliuza urithi wake, akasafiri na fedha aliyopata, akaenda nchi ya mbali ambako aliitumia ovyo. <sup>14</sup> Alipomaliza kutumia kila kitu, kukatokea njaa kali katika nchi ile, naye akaanza kuhangaika. <sup>15</sup> Akaomba kazi kwa mwananchi mtu mmoja wa huko naye akampeleka shambani mwake kulisha nguruwe. <sup>16</sup> Alitamani kula maganda waliyokula wale nguruwe, ila hakuna mtu aliyempa kitu. <sup>17</sup> Alipoanza kupata akili akafikiri: `Mbona kuna wafanyakazi wengi wa baba yangu wanaokula na kusaza, nami ninakufa njaa?` <sup>18</sup> Nitarudi kwa baba yangu na kumwambia: Baba, nimemkosea Mungu, na nimekukosea wewe pia. <sup>19</sup> Sistahili hata kuitwa mwanao. Nifanye kama mmoja wa wafanyakazi wako.` <sup>20</sup> Basi, akaanza safari ya kurudi kwa baba yake. Alipokuwa bado yu mbali, baba yake alimwona, na kwa moyo wa huruma alimkimbilia, akamkumbatia na kumbusu. <sup>21</sup> "Mwanawe akamwambia: `Baba, nimemkosea Mungu, na nimekukosea wewe pia. Sistahili hata kuitwa mwanao.`" <sup>22</sup> Lakini baba yake akawaambia watumishi wake: `Haraka! Leteni nguo nzuri mkamvike! Mvisheni pete na viatu!` <sup>23</sup> Mchinjeni ndama mnono; tule kusherehekea! <sup>24</sup> Kwa sababu huyu mwanangu alikuwa amekufa, kumbe yu mzima alikuwa amepotea, lakini sasa amepatikana.` Wakaanza kufanya sherehe. <sup>25</sup> "Wakati huo kaka yake alikuwa bado shambani. Alipokuwa akirudi na kukaribia nyumbani akasikia vifijo na ngoma. <sup>26</sup> Akamwita mmoja wa watumishi, akamwuliza: `Kuna nini?`" <sup>27</sup> Huyu mtumishi akamwambia: `Ndugu yako amerudi nyumbani, na baba yako amemchinjia ndama mnono kwa kuwa amempata akiwa salama salimini.`" <sup>28</sup> Huyu kijana mkubwa akawaka hasira hata akakataa kuingia nyumbani. Baba yake akatoka nje na kumsihi aingie. <sup>29</sup> Lakini yeye akamjibu: `Kumbuka! Miaka yote nimekutumikia, sijavunja amri yako hata mara moja. Umenipa nini? Hujanipa hata mwana mbuzimmoja nikafanye sherehe pamoja na rafiki zangu!` <sup>30</sup> Lakini mtoto wako huyu aliyekula mali yako pamoja na makahaba, mara tu alipokuja umemchinjia yule ndama mnono.`" <sup>31</sup> Baba yake akamjibu: `Mwanangu, wewe uko pamoja nami siku zote, na kila nilicho nacho ni chako. <sup>32</sup> Ilitubidi kufanya sherehe na kufurahi, kwa sababu huyu ndugu yako alikuwa amekufa, kumbe yu mzima; alikuwa amepotea, lakini sasa amepatikana.`" (Luk 15:11 SWA)

Dear Brothers and Sisters

### **The Lost Son**

The parable relates how a man had two sons. The younger son asks, and receives, the share of the inheritance that would pass to him on the death of the father. A few days later this son then leaves home and goes to a far off country. There he squanders his wealth on riotous living spending all that he had received. Now he has nothing left the only job he could get was looking after some pigs, but he could not earn enough even for food and was reduced to feeding on the swine's food. And in his extremity he recalled the food eaten by his father's servants had to eat, and decides to return to his father, casting himself on his father's mercy admitting his foolish and unkind behaviour saying I have sinned against heaven (Yahweh) and against you and am no more worthy so be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants. He then made his journey to his father's home receives him with great joy, kills the fatted calf for him and holds a great celebration. At this, the elder son sulkily complains of unfair treatment. The father remonstrates with him, encouraging him to take a more positive attitude towards his younger brother, now restored to the family. This is not unusual in our times for young men and women to leave their father and mother, it is hard at any time to say good bye to your children. The father in the parable relates how His father even when he was great way off saw him coming a great way off. How many times does a parent hope to see their children again, it is not easy to forget the children they loved and so do even after many years pass by.

This father saw his son coming while he was a great way off, and his heart filled with compassion he ran to meet his chastened son, who admitted his selfishness saying, "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you Dad and I am not worthy to be called your son.

The younger brother is typical of many young people of every age, but especially of this age. Seeing the character of the father in the

latter part of the story, it is quite certain that both lads had been brought up in a household where righteous principles had been compassionately applied. It is interesting, then, to see that each had responded in such different ways. The older boy had absorbed all the principles of rigid righteousness, without absorbing the balancing virtues of mercy and grace. The younger son, on the other hand, had not paid attention to any of this; or perhaps he had been repelled by the self-righteousness of his brother. Whatever the reason, the world's ways seemed far more attractive—so he left the Truth.

But sometimes the hand of God takes a part in the lives even of those who turn their backs on Him. In his extremity the prodigal came to his senses: “He came to himself”. He was driven to this by *evil* experiences. Hard times may do more spiritual good for us than any amount of ease and luxury. And when we experience hard times, perhaps we ought to see them as the hand of God in our lives, and be as quick as we can to find their lessons.

Notice how the father was looking for the prodigal's return. It may have been several years since his departure, to judge from the (possibly unreliable) evidence of the older brother's comment, “these many years do I serve thee”. However long it had been, the father was the first to see the prodigal return, while he was still a long way off.

Like the shepherd looking for the one lost sheep, and the woman looking for the one lost coin, the father had been looking for the one lost son long after everyone else had forgotten him and, perhaps, had thought they were well rid of him. And then, what a reception! Not waiting for the prodigal to finish his carefully rehearsed speech, he gave orders that there should be a festival to celebrate his return. Of course, it was right that the prodigal should confess the errors of his ways, as David did when he sinned with Bathsheba. But the father perceived the state of mind out of which the words were generated long before the first word was uttered: “His father *saw* him, and had compassion” while he was “yet a great way off”. The father's joy is

very evident: “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24).

But the older son was not so well pleased. He had been in the field, working, when the prodigal returned. On his way home, he heard the sounds of festivity and enquired what they meant. It seems rather unlikely that the father would not have immediately sent a servant to tell the older son of the younger’s coming. But it would appear that he had simply grunted in response, and angrily carried on with his work, being not in the least excited by his brother’s return. Now, on his way home from the fields, his surprise was not so much on account of his young brother’s return. He may have anticipated his return. But what really irked him was the excessive merriment which the homecoming had caused.

Truculent refusal to acknowledge the reason for joy, because of his own narrow view of things, the older son complained about what was, in his view, the unseemly excess of the homecoming. He thought that the mere automated rendering of *service* gave him the right to expect the father’s exclusive love and consideration: “Lo, these many years do I *serve* thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy *commandment*” (Luke 15:29).

Here we see the Pharisaical teaching coming to the fore, as Luke 18:11&12 reminds us “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.”

So the older son represents the established Jewish system, we can see the relevance of Paul’s assessment of their attitude: “They being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about **to establish their own righteousness**, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3).

This is still a challenge to us today. Of course we must faithfully engage in our devotions, our attendance at meetings and so on, but we must never depend upon these exercises to get us into the

kingdom by themselves. And like the older son, we need to remember that there is far more value in a voluntary and balanced *return* to the Lord, than in an *unquestioning*, stolid attendance to the things of the Truth, with our hearts elsewhere. But if one should stray and be restored, this is an occasion for joy, not for childish petulance and recriminations. The older brother's grumpy words reveal a secret wish to have had the spirit of the prodigal: furthermore he comes close to blaming his father for not releasing him to live a similarly dissolute life.

So we see several points emerge:

(1) There is a spirit of self-centred discontent. "I have never received even so much as a kid, even though I served you faithfully all these years. Yet for *him* you have killed the fatted calf!"

(2) The older brother **also has friends outside the family!** And we can discern how inadvertently, he gives away his secret. In his mind, and perhaps in his furtive moments, **he** *has* been wayward. But his folly is not as obvious as that of his younger brother, **except to God**: "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after" (1 Timothy 5:24). Of course he has missed the point: the fatted calf had not been killed so that the prodigal might rejoice with his friends in further dissolution. And the father had not given the younger son his share of the inheritance in the first place *so that* he might become dissolute.

(3) Notice the anger verging upon hatred, in the older brother's "this thy son".

(4) Notice the prejudice: whereas Jesus merely said that the prodigal "wasted his substance in riotous living", the elder brother complained that he had "**devoured thy** (the father's) **living** with harlots". How could he possibly know how the living had been spent? He had not been there. We should see that the spirit of the older son is prepared to imagine the worst of his brother, always ready to listen to hearsay and destructive gossip. It is true that the prodigal *had* wasted his substance—none was more acutely aware of this

then he. But that it had been wasted in just that specific manner, could not have been known with certainty. We see how readily we believe ill of our brethren, and this is certainly the point which Jesus wished the Pharisees to notice. And so should we.

(5) The father had given only that part of the family inheritance to the younger son as was coming to him in any case. When given to the lad it ceased to be the father's; it never belonged to the elder son, nor ever could. Where, then, is the logic in the elder's complaint against his younger brother's wasting of what was actually his own? The elder brother was covetous. He evidently thought that rather than have the goods wasted, they should have been given to him. He finds fault with the father's generosity and compassion towards the younger son. We need to learn to keep out of the personal affairs of others. The Father will give *us* just so much as He thinks is right, and it is none of our business how He deals with others. In any case, as the father pointed out, now that the younger son had received his share, *all* that remained would be inherited by the older son!

The parable shows that there are two levels of consciousness operating in our lives. There is the secular level, the world of *things*; and there is the spiritual level, the world of intellect and emotion. At first, the two boys had the first in common. The prodigal *learned* the second; the older son shows no signs of ever rising to anything like the same spiritual level. Indeed the parable ends abruptly, in some sense with the real question unanswered. Did the older son hear his father and change his attitude? We cannot tell. Sadly, though, we know that in the Pharisees the lesson was missed. We should guard against a similar failure in ourselves.

### **Why *Three* Parables?**

And finally, why three parables, all saying more or less the same thing? Well, there is always the fact that a good teacher will emphasise his most important points so that their importance may be better appreciated. The dream of Pharaoh was repeated to emphasise the urgency of its message; and a three-fold cord is not

quickly broken. This point should not be overlooked. As a number, three is used extensively in scripture for emphasis.

But it may be that the three parables are given together because each shows a lost thing which fits into a different category from either of the others. People and things can only get lost in one of these three ways: they may get lost because they are ignorant, stupid or unheeding—like the sheep. They may get lost without the least realisation that they *are* lost, and through means over which they have not the least control—like the coin. Or they might get lost through deliberate, willful exercise of choice—like the prodigal son.

The point is this: however one may fall by the wayside, the Lord can recover him. Those who are His, and are lost without any knowledge of the fact, or any responsibility, He may carefully pick out of the dirt and dust—like the woman's coin. Those who are careless or distracted He may gently take up—like the sheep. Those who are willfully lost He may cause to think again by bringing suitable circumstances to pass in their lives—as He did with the prodigal son.

And the parables of the lost teach those of us who never seem to stray that we need to appreciate the value of those whom the Lord restores, realizing that our case is no different, in principle, from theirs.

Selected and amended D.H.H