

The Prodigal Son

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The parable of the prodigal son came about because of the criticisms of the Pharisees and scribes who rebuked Jesus for always being in the company of sinners. They believed that God wanted the church to keep away from its defaulters. They had added many extra burdens on those who wanted to be restored and who wanted to serve God... Jesus responded with 3 parables about the importance for the shepherds to be involved in restoring the lives of those who had become victims of sin and sometimes the victims of the Pharisees. (the Pharisees were supposed to assist the sinners, not condemn them). As a result, Jesus revealed three parables, back to back (the parable of the good Samaritan is also another parable along the same lines but is not mentioned here). These three parables reveal all three possible circumstances from which sinners may recover from their sin, be forgiven and restored. All three deal with those who have fallen away... they don't address evangelism as such, but portray all three variations of falling away and recovery. There well may be other spiritual truths also, but the principle theme addresses the original critics... **LUK 15:1** *Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

All 3 occur in Luke 15, taking up the whole chapter; this is also the most detailed account of restoration in the N/T...

The 1st is the lost sheep (the pastor traces the lost sheep in the world and restores). v4-7

The 2nd is the lost coin which is restored within the house (church). v8-10

The 3rd is the prodigal son (non pastor assisted... self motivated), he receives his assistance when he returns to the church. v11-32

1st... LUK 15:4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

2nd... LUK 15:8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver; if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together; saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

The following pages highlight some specific points of interest contained within the parable of the prodigal son... the 3rd parable. Some parables have a simple message contained within them, others also include numerous details that are not always clear during a casual reading of the scriptures. Sometimes, a little investigation, can reveal a fully detailed and precise message for the church. The prodigal son contains a lot more than a simple story of God's forgiveness and restoration.

The parable of the prodigal son is a message for the church. It contains the simple but clear message that some people do move away from the safety of their spiritual family. We are reminded that the world is an unsafe place that is merciless to its inhabitants... it offers pleasure to the natural man, but cannot offer pleasure nor safety to the spiritual man. The world forsakes its own, because it doesn't have the power to care for them when real problems arise. Alternatively, God's family is a place of permanent safety and offers unconditional mercy for those deceived by themselves or the world, who wish to be restored. It highlights the over zealous approach of family members who don't understand their fathers love nor their true family values... it reveals the gulf between the father and the negative child in such instances. It ultimately promotes the assurance of instant, safe restoration... the true will of God the father. It concludes with the critical difference between life and death. To be safely within the family was to be alive... to be outside, was to be dead. These three methods of restoration are part of the churches approach. We cannot choose one method, while ignoring the others. All three must be part of the shepherds tool box, at all times.

Other mercy, forgiveness, restoration scriptures are as follows...

2SAM 12:13

PSA 32:5, 41:3, 51:9-13, 94:14, 103:12,

PRO 16:6

ISA 55:6-8,

EZE 33:10-12,34:15,

MAT 9:6, 25:31-46, 26:28,

LUK 6:35-36,

ACT 13:34-38

ROM 4:6-8, 5:8-9,20, 7:24-25, 12:20,

ICOR 13:4-7.

2COR 2:5-11,3:6,7:7-12,

GAL 6: 1-2,

TIT 2:14,

ITHE 5:14-15,

HEB 3:13, 4:15-16, 9:13-14, 10:14-25, 13:5,

JAM 2:13, 5:14-20,

I PET 4:8,

IJOH 1:7-2:2,

3rd... **LUK 15:11** *And he said, A certain man had two sons:*

12 *And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.*

13 *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.*

14 *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

15 *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

16 *And he would fain (gladly) have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

17 *And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

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

19 *And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

20 *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 (exerted himself), and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

21 *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.*

22 *But (nevertheless) 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:*

23 *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:*

11 The father is God in this parable and should be seen to be setting the precedent for the shepherd's attitudes within the church (they promote and act on God's wisdom).

12 The younger would have been impatient as a youth typically are and would have been looking forward to being free of home constraints, being very optimistic about his future. Being younger he would have received one half the inheritance of the older brother. He possibly had need to prove himself.

13 He gathered everything he had... leaving nothing behind and went into a far country (he left the church and went into the world). The distance between the church and the world is huge (often life or death), it is far away. Lacking the constraints of supportive fellowship he was unwise and wasted all of his inheritance. The father never stopped his son.... he allowed the son to make his own choice.

14 He went to the limit of sinful excesses leaving nothing in reserve... spiritually or naturally. When he was at his lowest point a problem surfaced that was totally beyond him. A famine arose and food was scarce and was getting scarcer. He had irretrievably lost his inheritance... (God's blessings were fully exhausted).

15 He went backwards in the far country (the world), ending up having to rely upon his new friends... they didn't have the same compassion as the church. He lost his independence (he became a servant) and found himself feeding unclean animals (swine)... absolutely shameful for a Jew.

16 He was desperate for food, he even contemplated eating pig food (what could be lower?), because no one in the world offered him the food he needed (the world's food is unclean and unfilling). The world feeds upon the weakness of the flesh, but they never offer anything in return.

17 He came to his senses... his mind began to return from the far country (the world). Even the least (the hirelings) of those who were in his father's house (the church)... even those who were lower than his birthright... they had more food than they could eat. Here he was starving to death, when those who were mere hired servants, were better off than he was. He was being humbled by his predicament and by the positive memories of his past family life (the church).

18 He determined to change his way... he did the hardest thing possible for a human; he admitted he was wrong. He acknowledged his sin in his own mind and wanted to make amends... he humbled himself.

19 He was comprehending the full extent of his sin, he knew how pathetic he really was... he turned his humility into repentance and wished to confess to his father (God). He realised that even the hired servants are far above his fallen state.

20 He made his mind up and converted his thoughts into actions. The return journey from the world to the church is only a repentant prayer away. He was starving to death... how long would he have survived without food?... how long a journey was he capable of making? Even before the first words were spoken (the confession), even before he walked in the door, his father raced out to him and embraced him. His father had always been looking for him. The father rejoiced in the return of his son above all other considerations... the time and length of the journey were incidental. The father knew why he was back and knew what he needed... he offered him unconditional love and support... the example for the church.

21 His father was already embracing him before he began his confession (the first contact since he left home). The confession occurred where the servants and brother were... not in the world (far country). He began his confession, but never finished it... his loving father cut him off before he could speak of his willingness to be treated as a servant (v19). He was already forgiven before he completed his confession. The son only wanted food and was willing to be a servant to achieve his goal... there was a display of mercy and forgiveness beyond expectation... he was totally pardoned.

22 The father never rebuked him, never interrogated him, put no parole conditions on him, never used him as a deterrent and never punished him... a very simple approach for those who love the simplicity of God's promises. To his son's surprise, he was fully restored... he was given much more than he imagined was possible. The robe (garment signalling first rank) the ring (the family seal) and the shoes (slaves always went barefooted) were all signs of the authority of his family and his restoration... they were certainly not the trappings of a servant or a person having to prove their sincerity. This is a precedent which was given by Jesus for the church to learn from.

23 The fatted calf wasn't reserved as a sacrifice, rather it was fattened for festive reasons (maybe, even the anticipation of the son returning). The father was preparing a feast for the whole family to celebrate the return of his wayward son. They were all expected to celebrate the return of the prodigal son... a major celebration. Not a time for punishment and retribution.

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again (once again); he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

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

27 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.

28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

29 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 gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

32 It was meet (absolute must) that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

24 This verse explains why a celebration was in order. While he was away from his family he was considered to be dead.... once he was back with his father and brother he was considered to be alive... a good reason to welcome and keep him in the home. He was reinstated from the dead to the living on the day he confessed, the same day he made the first contact with his father.

25 One of the other reasons for this parable is now surfacing. The older brother of the wayward son is about to demonstrate everything which God rejects. The father and servants are already celebrating the son's return... in the very midst of the celebration.

26 The older brother enquires why a feast is underway... he knew of no reason why such festivity should occur.

27 The brother heard the good news, but to him it was bad news. He was in no mood to celebrate, despite his father's joyful decision. To be outside the family is to be unsafe and unsound... according to the father. The servant magnified the father's words... the younger son was back in the family home, safe and sound... in good spiritual health. All in the same day of his confession and return.

28 The elder brother had built up anger and resentment against his younger brother, he also appeared to be jealous of his father's immediate positive response, to this man who had been worldly, but had repented. The older brother didn't share in the joy nor the significance of his brother's recovery. His father tried to pacify his anger by explaining the reason why he acted as he did.

Consider this verse mentioned earlier in the same chapter. (v7 *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

29 Pride and self righteousness of fellow brothers leave many wounded and needy people in the jaws of death. The worst thing about the older brother's attitude, was the denial of his own rights that his father was demonstrating and willing to offer. The older brother would not have recovered if he was in the same position, because he had no understanding of his father's love. He worked loyally with his body and his mind, but not with his heart... he never really understood the nature of his father. If the older brother was in charge, the younger brother would have been prevented from returning home. Fortunately, the older brother had no say in the forgiveness of his brother... he could only offer a judgemental opinion; one which was categorically rejected.

30 The older brother's dispute was not that the younger was returned to the family... his dispute was 'as soon as this thy son was come'... he objected to the speed of the recovery not the recovery itself. He didn't realise the significance that his brother had been dead and was now alive. He certainly didn't share his father's love, nor did he understand his father's compassion. All he could think about was passing judgement on the younger brother... he wanted to refuse him access to the family, maybe he would have allowed him home if he could prove himself for several months? (but his father had greater wisdom than that). All he could do was to highlight immorality... he could not get past the need to punish the sin (he could have named many sins, but he was preoccupied with fornication). The father refused to give sin any power... he never bothered to discuss the sin.... he didn't even let his son finish his confession (21-22)... he was more interested in the safety of a confident restoration.

31 He had failed to appreciate the privileges that his father was capable of offering.... many don't appreciate the mercy of the Lord, because they have no perceived use for it. However, when David was in a similar position... he understood very well these words of the father... they saved his life.

32 The greatest victory is life over death... the recovering of sight to the blind. It is essential for the church to recognise and celebrate the saving of life... not to hinder the restoration of the repentant. The father could equally have excommunicated the older brother for his hard heart and ignorance, but he dealt equally with both sons... he unconditionally forgave both of them. The father saved two lives that day. The lost youth and the ignorant and judgemental older brother. Which was the greater victory? Whose sin was worse?

When we take on the responsibility of the father, we have to think and act like the father.... Jesus commanded it to be so. How does our attitude measure up when we compare ourselves with the father and the older brother? The older brother was also the priest of the family (the shepherd or pastor).

Keep in mind that this parable was in response to the criticism that Jesus spent too much time supporting sinners V2. The resulting three parables of which this is the last; deal with fallen away people, not the unsaved. The **only** rebuke in the parable fell upon the punishment mentality of the older brother.

MAT 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

*There is a distinct and obvious difference between restoration of the lost and rejecting the enemies and divisionaries of the church. These parables are about the lost and the weak.

THE TRILOGY OF REDEMPTION

The three parables in Luke refer to the redemption of lost sheep... it doesn't refer to initial salvation

UNITY OF THE THREE PARABLES	99 AND ONE LOST SHEEP Luke 15: 4-7	THE LOST COIN IN HOUSE Luke 15: 8-10	THE PRODIGAL SON Luke 15: 11-31
The background behind the recovery.	The lost sheep relies totally upon the shepherd's faith to be found and restored... The shepherd carries the full burden of redemption.	The coin is lost within the house (the church). Recovery is made possible by the diligence of the church to search, find and strengthen.	The immoral prodigal son makes his own way back to the church, but needs immediate, total support, forgiveness and care.
The Pharisees criticised Jesus for always being in the presence of sinners. The theme of the parables answers the criticism. Sinners need help for restoration.	4 <i>What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?</i> Top priority... find the lost.	8 <i>Either what woman having ten pieces of silver; if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?</i> Top priority... find the lost.	20 <i>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.</i> Top priority... restore.
The shepherd is revealed as the one who carries the full burden of restoration... not the lost sheep. This rebuked the self righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes. They preferred to control people rather than serve them.	5 <i>And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.</i> He carries the sheep home upon his own shoulders... bearing the full weight of restoration.	8 <i>...doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?</i> The coin has no power to find itself... it has no value until it is found.	20 <i>...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.</i> 22 <i>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:</i>
Celebrative attitude for every lost sinner at the time of recovery. A definite commandment to celebrate with the church, because of the spiritual magnitude of the victory.	6 <i>And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.</i>	9 <i>And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together; saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.</i>	23 <i>And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:</i>
The victory is greater than we can imagine. The angels rejoice more over the restored sinner than they do over those that never went astray in the first place.	7 <i>I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.</i>	10 <i>Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.</i>	32 <i>It was meet (an absolute must) that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.</i>
The need to punish or 'parole' the repentant is rejected. Mercy must instantly override judgement, when repentance is confessed. The victory of life over death is the real joy of the church. The most significant factor above all other considerations.	<i>No punishment, penalties, deterrents or parole conditions listed.</i>	<i>No punishment, penalties, deterrents or parole conditions listed.</i>	30 <i>But as soon as this thy son was come (on his immediate return), which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.</i> 32 <i>It was meet (essential) that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.</i>