

FBC Service Sunday June 4 2023 Luke 15:11-32 The Prodigal Returns

Today, we're looking at one of the most famous parables ever uttered by the Lord Jesus. Chapter 15 of Luke contains three parables, which have been labelled by some as God's Lost and Found. Each of these stories deals with lost things that are found by the owner.

As Jesus moves through these stories, He's placing greater and greater emphasis upon the value of the thing lost.

In the parable of The Lost Sheep, v. 3-7, there was 1 sheep out of 100 missing, or 1%.

In the parable of The Lost Silver, v. 8-10, there was 1 coin out of 10 missing, or 10%.

In the parable of The Lost Son, there is 1 son out of 2 missing, or 50 %. In the first 2 parables, the objects missing were animal and material. **In this parable, the object missing is a human.**

Each time, the object lost grows in value and importance. Jesus is trying to tell us that "Every life is precious to God!"

Jesus tells a story about a young man who made a wrong decision and what happened to him. We call it the parable of the prodigal son. Many people consider it the greatest short story ever written.

The parable is the story of a father with two sons. The younger son chafes under his father's rule and perhaps feels put down by his obedient older brother. So he demands his inheritance from his father. And his father gives it to him.

Taking the money, he leaves his home and journeys to a place the Bible calls **"the far country."** There he spends every penny he has on wild living. Parties day and night, women on both arms, the good life, the fast lane.

Whatever he wants, he buys with his father's money. Eventually his money runs out. When a severe famine breaks out, not having any money and being far away from home, he attaches himself to a farmer who says, "The only work I have is feeding my pigs."

The prodigal son ends up penniless, homeless, starving, feeding the pigs, and reduced to eating their food. He who had eaten at the best restaurants just a few weeks earlier now dines with the pigs.

What a come down! How on earth did it all happen?

His fall began with a selfish act, a total disregard for his father. He said, "I want my money and I want it now." All he could see was the dollar signs. "Dad, give me my money. Forget you and forget my family. Forget my brother. Forget my reputation. Give me my money. I want to get out of here."

What A Selfish Request this was! Notice what this boy said to his father: **"Give me!"** His focus is on "me". His life is wrapped up within himself, and what he wants. He cares for no one else.

In spite of his son's inconsiderate request, the father agrees!

He could have refused and kicked the son out, but he doesn't. He merely does what his son demands and gives his son his inheritance. *"His father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons."*

This father has poured his life into building his estate so that he might have something to pass down to his sons. He gave his son the result and sum total of his life and work. The younger son wanted all the father could give him.

He gets just what he wants, but soon finds out that "all that glitters is not gold."

He acted hastily. With his pockets full, off he went to a far country. When you hear that phrase, what do you think of, somewhere thousands of miles away? **Just where is the far country the Bible speaks of? Its one step outside of God's will.**

You could be living in your own home and be in the far country.

You could be working at your job and be in the far country.

You could be going to college and still be living in the far country.

You could be in church every Sunday and still be living in the far country.

Because the far country is not that far away. It's just one step outside the will of God.

The prodigal wasted everything he had. The word prodigal means "extravagantly wasteful." When he left, he never intended to come back home because he took all his money with him.

If he was planning on coming back, he would only have taken some spending money with him and left some back there. **But, no, he deliberately did what he did.** He wasn't tricked into spending his money. He left home intending to spend it all. I'm outa here and I'm never coming back.

Did he have a good time spending all his money? You bet he did. Don't let anyone tell you the world doesn't have its pleasures. Why do you think it's so alluring to so many?

He separated himself from every relationship that was important to him. By leaving, he broke his relationship with his father and his brother. He also left his family and his friends. He rejected everything that was good and right. All of that went out the window.

He made a long string of bad decisions. One bad decision leads to another. Once you start making bad decisions, it's easier to make them as you go along. But pretty soon you're about 15 bad decisions down the road and far away from where you used to be.

There was a severe famine in the far country our story says. **Whenever you leave God, there will always be a famine in the far country.** It looks so good. It looks like a land flowing with milk and honey. In the far country you enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

In the end he lost everything. He ended up with the pigs. This son of a wealthy father has now thrown it all away.

He who had it all has now lost it all. He who came from a good family now sleeps with the pigs. The prodigal son has hit rock bottom. O, how the mighty are fallen.

God often lets that happen to people in the far country until they finally hit rock bottom. Then and only then do they begin to think about returning home again.

But praise God, there is a way back home for any prodigal.

When the prodigal son hits bottom, his life began to change. **Five words tell the story, and O, how powerful they are and so profound. Take a listen!**

“When he came to his senses.”

That’s a great phrase—**“He came to his senses.”** He had turned away from that which was good to that which was bad,

He had turned away from that which was worth everything to that which was worth nothing,

He had turned away from that which has eternal value to that which has no value.

So what was it that brought him to his senses? He was hungry. His stomach made him come back to his father. That’s not a very exalted motive. Nothing suggests he turned back to his father because he realized what a terrible thing he had done.

Why would a father take back a son whose only motive for coming back home is because he’s hungry? **Because that’s what it means to be a father.**

To every prodigal we can say with assurance, if you’re hungry, I know where you can be fed. If you’re tired of eating with the pigs, I know where you can join a banquet that never ends. If you’re thirsty, I know where you can get a drink of fresh, clear, flowing, living water.

He said to himself, *“I will go back to my father.”* Repentance is what happens when you’ve been going one direction and finally you hit the bottom, and you say, “I’ve gone this way long enough.

I’m going to turn around, and I’m going to go this way now.” **Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of life.** It means to change the direction of your life.

The young man says, “I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”

You know you’re really serious about changing your life when you stop making excuses for your behaviour. Think what the prodigal son could have said. “It was really my older brother’s fault. He always picked on me, and Dad always liked him best.”

Or he might say, “If Dad had given me more money I wouldn’t be in this fix.” Or, “Those cheap women seduced me and then stole my money. And that farmer gave me a lousy job.” He could have found a thousand excuses.

But he didn't. He simply said, *"I have sinned."* Those three little words—simple, so short, yet so profound—mark the beginning of a new life for this young man. When you stop making excuses for your failures, you're not far from a brand-new life.

Notice his new humility. While he's still in the pigpen, he mentally rehearses what he will say to his father. *"I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men."* What a tremendous statement that is.

He didn't make any deals with his father. He came back home with no pre-conditions. He didn't say, "Dad, before I'll come back, we've got to make a deal." He didn't say, "You have to give me exactly what I had before. I'm coming back, but I want that fortune I lost. You have to replace it."

That's not real repentance. This man was so deeply wounded over the way he lived that he said, "Father, I'm not worthy to be called your son. I've disgraced you. If you'll take me back, I'll work like a hired hand. I won't even call myself your son anymore."

Real repentance doesn't make deals with God.

"So he got up and went to his father." After spiritual awakening comes repentance, then honesty, then humility. It all leads to the resolution to go home. That's where you take the step.

It's certainly easy to criticize the prodigal son. But there's at least one good thing about this young man. When the time came to move, he moved. He didn't let the grass grow under his feet. So many people say, "Tomorrow I will arise and go to my father.

Next week I will arise and go to my father. Next year, next day, next month. Give me some time to think about it." **Not this man.** This man said, "I'm going to go." And he got up and went right then.

How hard is it to come from the far country back to God? **The hardest part is the first step.** A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. And that's the one that brings you half way home.

How do you think he felt coming home? I think he was scared to death. As he shuffled along that road, one question went through his mind: What is my father going to say?

Will he take me back? With his head down, he shuffled along that dirt road, embarrassed and humiliated. One great question on his mind: What will my dad do?

Our text tells us that while he was still a long way off, his father saw him. **This is a great moment. His father sees him first.**

His father saw him, and moved with compassion, saw his son in the distance who was dead and who has now come back to life, and he ran to meet his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The word means he smothered him with kisses.

As the prodigal headed home, he didn't know what he might find there. What he found was incredible! He found a father who had been longing, looking and living for his son's return.

He found a father filled with love, compassion and grace who received him and loved him back into fellowship! The father wouldn't even allow the son to finish his little speech. He just loved him back into a right relationship.

And what were the clear signs of the father's welcome:

1. The kiss, the sign of forgiveness.
2. The robe, the sign of honour.
3. The ring, the sign of authority.
4. The sandals, the sign of freedom. Why? Because the slave went barefoot.
5. The feast, the sign of a joyful welcome.

All this shows us how much God loves us?

*He loves us enough to let us go.

*He loves us enough to let us hit bottom.

*He loves us enough to let us come back.

*He loves us so much that he will run to meet us.

That's how much God loves us.

The way back to the Father is always through the far country. Where is the far country? The far country is anywhere outside the will of God.

The far country may be for some like it was for the prodigal son, but for most of us it's not going to be that. If we find ourselves there, **our Heavenly Father says, delay no longer, "Come home."**

Sometimes as parents, we look at our children, especially when they seem to be far from the Lord, and feel hopeless or guilty or angry or frustrated, and wonder where God is.

There are many ways to answer that, but this much is certain. He's not silent or absent or uncaring. Nor is He stumped or surprised by young people who seem to have rejected all they have been taught.

Because He loves our children far more than we do, He can bring them back to himself, though the road back may be long and hard, though it may seem to be going backwards for a season.

At some point we need to relinquish our children into His hands and say, "Lord, they belong to you.

It's so hard to yield them to the Lord, but it's made easier if we remember that His love never fails, that He's watching and waiting for them like the prodigal to come home.

Does it seem totally impossible that he or she will ever change? Do you get angry thinking about their foolish choices? Do your prayers seem useless to you? Pay no attention to your feelings.

Our prayers are a vital part of God's plan to bring loved ones back from the far country.

Don't give up.

Keep on praying.

Keep believing.

You never know what God will do.

When you pray for a loved one who seems hardened against the Lord, pray that the eyes of their heart might be opened so that the light of God can come flooding in. And if that seems hopeless, at least it puts the hopeless case at God's doorstep, which is where it belongs.

One Saturday night there was what seemed to be a "hopeless case" in the Garden Tomb. On Sunday morning the whole world changed.

You never know what God will do, so keep on believing and keep on praying. God specializes in impossible situations, and He loves to prove that hopeless cases aren't hopeless after all.

So never give up. Pray, pray and keep on praying. Your prayers accomplish more than you have ever dreamed.