

Lesson 18 Luke 15- Parables of Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son

In our last lesson we saw Jesus use the theme of a great banquet to teach about the Kingdom of God. In this lesson, Jesus uses parables to teach about how much our heavenly Father loves us. He rejoices whenever one who was lost is found and is returned to the fold.

1. **In any society there is usually a group of people who are marginalized, demonized, and/or avoided.**

Read Luke 15:1-7. Who in our society today would represent the tax collectors and sinners mentioned here?

Luke 15:1-7 The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, ² but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So to them he addressed this parable. ⁴ "What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? ⁵ And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy ⁶ and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

2. **Reflection: This parable is another allegory. Read again Luke 15:1-7 and footnotes. Read also the prophesy in Micah 5:3-4.**

Who is the shepherd in the allegory?

What is suggested by the action of *lifting up* the sheep upon his shoulders?

Micah 5:3-4 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. ⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

3. **Reflect on the Lost Sheep and Read Matthew 10:29-30.**

Was it really worth leaving the majority of the sheep to go search for the one?

What does this say about God's desire for the lost, or the priorities of Heaven?

Matthew 10:29-30 Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. ³⁰ Even all the hairs of your head are counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

4. **Read Luke 15:8-10 and footnotes. Reflection: What do *you* think the emphasis is in these two parables together? Is it hope for the wayward, the lost being found, or perhaps the great amount of effort put into searching for the lost?**

Luke 15:8-10 "Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.' ¹⁰ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

5. Read Luke 15:11-32 and footnotes. See questions below.

Read Luke 15:11-32 ¹¹ Then he said, "A man had two sons, ¹² and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. ¹³ After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. ¹⁴ When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. ¹⁵ So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. ¹⁶ And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. ¹⁷ Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. ¹⁸ I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.'" ²⁰ So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' ²² But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. ²⁵ Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. ²⁷ The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. ³⁰ But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' ³¹ He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. ³² But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

How shameful would it be to ask for inheritance before the father was dead?

How did the younger son spend his inheritance?

What is significant about the fact that the young son was reduced to tending *pigs* for a living?

6. The inheritance of older son was not in jeopardy because the estate had already been divided. Why was the older son unable to rejoice in his brother's return? How is his attitude shameful?

*7. The Ignatius Bible suggests that this story could be about the Northern tribes of Israel who were taken away by the Assyrians and worshipped other gods, and married Pagans. This parable could be about their being welcomed, after their repentance, by a merciful God. Others have suggested that this story could be about sinful people who **repent on their death beds**, after a life of godlessness, and are welcomed by the mercy of our loving God.*

What does the story tell us about the justice of God?

Does He judge by the same standards we do?