

PARABLES IN LUKE

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Lesson 2

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON Luke 15:11-32

Why is it that in Christian circles we tend to exalt the person who has been converted to Christ out of a very sinful life of drugs or booze or harlotry or gambling and take for granted the conversion of the person who has an uneventful past and is only guilty of lying, cheating, laziness, disrespect, stealing or whatever? We do this because as sinful men we have a flair for the sensational and somehow think that some conversions are more important than others.

The Parable of the Lost Son speaks directly to this situation. This parable is about two sons and looks at salvation from the diving perspective. These two sons were completely different personalities. Apparently the older son was saved at an early age and had a very faithful and obedient life, and the younger son was saved later in life after a life of wanton living. This parable tells us that God has a plan for the salvation of His people. He alone knows the beginning and the ending and thus He knows when and how His people will be saved. Every conversion is important and precious to God.

THE SUBTLETY OF SIN (15:11-13)

“And He said, ‘A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’” – The younger son wanted his inheritance early and according to Jewish law this was quite permissible if the father consented. Apparently, this young man felt if he could get this money, which was a considerable sum, he would be happy. He was convinced that if he could live as he pleased and do as he pleased, he could find the real meaning to life. He earnestly believed that money was the key to happiness.

However, we know that money never makes anyone happy. The more money one makes the more he wants and the more he wants the more he desires. The lust for money is an endless circle.

“And he divided his wealth between them.” – The father kept the older son’s inheritance and gave the younger son his money.

“And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country,” – This rebellious son went as far away as possible from his father. He knew that distance would make it impossible for the father to have any ties to him and he would be free to live it up. The young man was raised in a home that honored God, but he not only wanted no physical ties with his own father, he wanted no spiritual ties either. The lust for sin caused him to throw over his spiritual heritage.

How true this still is today. Children, not yet converted, often throw over their Christian home influence. When they get away from parents and home they go wild and

abandon their spiritual heritage. Therefore, they become estranged from their parents and alienated from God.

“And there he squandered his estate with loose living.” – The young man fell to the subtlety of sin. He thought that money and sex would bring him happiness. He believed that unrestrained pleasure would bring him real freedom. He really believed that if he had all the money he wanted, all the women he wanted, and all the pleasure he wanted, he would be happy. Consequently, he became a very sinful man. He lived only for pleasure and this must have broken his father’s heart. God’s heart is grieved and angered when He sees the sinfulness of men.

THE MISERY OF SIN (15:14-16)

“Now when he had spent everything,” – He spent every last dime he had on women, booze and gambling. He ate the finest food and wore the finest clothes. He enjoyed the pleasures of sin for awhile until his money ran out.

There is a temporary pleasure in sin, but it takes its toll and never brings satisfaction.

“A severe famine occurred in that country.” – While this young sinner was at sinful work, God was doing a sovereign work. God set providential circumstances to bring this young man to the end of himself so he would see his need of repentance and return to his father.

Quite often people, because of their stubborn wills and rebellious hearts, will not repent and turn to Jesus Christ unless some tragedy or hardship falls upon them. Until some great crisis comes, they think that they can go it alone but when God’s providence strikes them, they are brought to their knees as sinners.

“And he began to be in need.” -- He was hungry. Circumstances brought this young man to see his need. There was not only a realization of a physical need, but, more importantly, there was the beginning of the realization of a spiritual need.

No one comes to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour until he feels a spiritual need in his heart. A person needs to see that he is a sinner, separated from God, having no hope in himself to save himself. Until a person comes to this point, we can argue with him, beg him to come to Christ, cry before him, or whatever, but until he sees he is a sinner under God’s wrath, he will never respond to Jesus Christ. He must see a genuine spiritual need in his own heart before he will accept Jesus Christ.

“And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country,” – This young man had sunk so low that he gave himself over to other people as a slave. He sold himself to live. At one point he had everything, but now he had nothing. He had money, women, wine and pleasure but sin had taken its toll on him. He now sold himself to make a buck. His sensual freedom actually brought him into slavery.

“And he sent him into his fields to feed swine.” – Feeding swine in the Jewish culture was the worst job a person could have. It was like a person who works in a sewer or is a garbage collector. It was as low as a man could get in the Jewish culture. Sin had taken its toll and he was at the bottom of the barrel. He was a low-down, dirty pig-feeder!

“And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating,” – He still had not gone low enough. He was actually eating the pig’s food to stay

alive. He was so hungry that he would do anything to eat. He was as low as a bum on skid row. He was as low as a man could get.

God will drive a sinner as low as he needs to go until that sinner cries out for repentance.

“And no one was giving anything to him.” – Nobody cared about this young man. A few months before, he was rich and the talk of the town. He was flashing his fifty, hundred and thousand dollar bills. People liked him because he had dough. He had friends because money attracts superficial friends. He had gone so low because of sin that no human being could help him. He was a despicable person. No person could or would come to his aid. No one cared about this young man’s existence. He was a zero.

THE WONDERS OF CONVERSION (15:17-20a)

“But when he came to his senses,” – He began to have serious thoughts about life and its meaning. He began to come to grips as to where he was in life. God was at work and now the young man saw that the problem was that he was trying to run his own life apart from God. He realized he had to change or perish.

A few years ago I talked to a young girl who was a junior in college. She had been living a very sexually loose life but had become a Christian. When she was at the height of her sin, she came to the conclusion that she was ruining her life and if she did not come to grips with herself and God, she soon would be walking the streets as a harlot. She repented and turned to Christ to save her from her immoral life. Today she is a radiant Christian.

“He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!’” – His first thought was to come to grips with his physical need of hunger, but his real problem was spiritual. He had a sin problem that had to be dealt with. He was where he was because of the spiritual rebellion in his own heart.

“I will get up and go to my father,” – He finally came to grips with the problem and saw that it was the big “I” that had to change. He could only solve his physical problem by coming to grips with his spiritual problem. His real problem was that he had rebelled against his earthly father and his Heavenly Father. He had to humble himself, swallow his pride, and go back to his father after squandering his inheritance, ruining the family name, and abandoning all his family.

Sinners must humble themselves and swallow their pride and admit that they cannot save themselves. Until they humble themselves, they will never be saved.

“And I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.’” – He finally realized that he had sinned against his father and against God.

When a man repents and is converted, he changes his mind about sin, God and Christ. A sinner must see that he has sinned against God. No one will ever truly repent until he sees he has sinned against God and God only. A sinner must realize that he has broken the holy, moral law of God and is under God’s wrath because of his disobedience and is headed toward hell. Until a sinner sees this, he will never truly change his mind about his present sinful life and receive Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. Remember that all disobedience and rebellion is ultimately against God!

“I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” – This young man was no longer boastful and proud, but he was humbled in the

dust. He was willing to come back home, even if it meant being a servant and not a son. He wanted to go home because he knew that is where he really belonged.

“And he got up and came to his father.” – He knew he had to confess to his father if he was ever to go home. We know he truly repented because he got up and did something about the situation. He not only thought about repentance, he repented and proved his repentance by the action of going to his father.

THE GLORIES OF RESTORATION (15:20b-24)

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.” – This literally says that he kissed him over and over again. The father loved his son. Perhaps the father waited and watched daily for his son. The father may have sat on his porch and said, “Perhaps today is the day my precious son will return.” Day after day he waited. Then one day he saw a silhouette of a man in the horizon. The closer the man came, the father was able to make out some of the features and he realized it was his son. The young man, filled with guilt, shame, and fear, moved very slowly towards his father’s house, but when the father saw his son, he ran to him. The hesitant son was met by an anxious father. For every one step the son took, the father took ten strides. He knew his son would not come home unless he was truly repentant and he showed compassion or grace upon him. He ran and embraced his son with weeping and joy, kissing him over and over again.

This is a beautiful picture of God’s attitude towards the repentant sinner. No matter what the sinner might have done before he or she was saved; no matter how deeply the sinner was in sin, God runs to shed his grace and love on that sinner and accepts him when he truly repents. This shows us how God reacts to a truly repentant sinner who humbles himself and accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. God longs for sinners to repent and is anxious for them to turn to Christ.

“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” – The son was so filled with guilt and shame that he told his father he was not worthy to be his son. But the father did not listen to his son, for he knew he had truly repented and that was all the father really cared about.

“But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet;’” – Because he had repented and come home, the father said that his son was to be given the best treatment and to be accepted as a full member in the family.

The robe speaks of the robe of Christ’s righteousness that God gives to all truly repentant sinners. The ring was probably a signet ring that persons used as a seal on something purchased to show ownership. This may be a picture of the Holy Spirit who seals for time and eternity all those who trust in Christ. The sandals speak of service. Even if a sinner has squandered everything and made a mess of his life, if he truly repents, there is still a place of service for him. God forgives, renovates and prepares the sinner to serve Him.

“And bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry;” – The father was so excited about his son’s return that he wanted a celebration. God gets excited when

a sinner repents and there is a great celebration in heaven among the angels and the elect of God.

“For this son of mine was dead,” – This young son was dead, not in a physical sense, but in that he was separated and alienated from his father. He willfully separated himself from his father.

All men are sinners and separated from God and are dead spiritually. They have no hope and are in a hopeless and helpless condition because of their rebellion.

“And has come to life again;” – The son had repented and come back again. He was now accepted by the father. His separation turned to fellowship; his alienation turned to acceptance.

A sinner who truly repents has the life of God in him. He no longer is an enemy of God but he is a friend; he is no longer at war with God, but is at peace through His Son Jesus Christ. He has eternal life that is found only in Jesus Christ and he has come alive spiritually.

“He was lost, and has been found. And they began to be merry.” – This young man was lost in that he was estranged from his father because of his rebellion, pride and arrogance. He was lost to himself and to his father, but the moment he repented he was found. He belonged to his father once again.

A sinner is separated from the Heavenly Father. He has lost the direction and meaning of life because of his desire to live independently of God. He is estranged and alienated from his Heavenly Father, but the moment he repents, he is found by God. He is no longer an enemy of the Father, but a friend, and he is bound for his heavenly home, heaven. Remember, dear friends, that God forgives the sinful past of all who truly repent, and He accepts sinners because they have accepted His Son, Jesus Christ.

THE COMPLICATIONS OVER CONVERSION (15:25-32)

“Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things might be.” -- I am going to suggest to you that this older son was a faithful believer in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He had believed since he was a very young child. He had been faithful to his earthly father and to his Heavenly Father since his earliest days. He never left home; he was obedient; he never squandered money; he was never guilty of riotous living. He was a very faithful son.

I suggest that this is a picture of a son who was raised in a Christian home and who received Jesus Christ at an early age. He never was guilty of riotous living or sexual immorality. He had a relatively moral life and was very faithful to his parents and his God.

“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.’ But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began entreating him.” --

The older son became angry because he was hurt and jealous over the action of his father towards his younger brother. This younger son had been rebellious and hateful, but when he repented the father dealt lavishly with him in a way that he had never done for his older, faithful son.

Perhaps there are children in a family who have been faithful Christians and one of the children was rebellious and worldly. When that one child was finally saved, a great deal of attention is shown to this one rebellious child, causing the others to feel left out.

The father kept begging the older son to come into the celebration because he was every bit as much a son and as important as the younger brother. In a very real sense, the older brother was more privileged because he had not lost his inheritance or been scarred by sin.

“But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a kid, that I might be merry with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him.’” --The older son’s pride was hurt. He was jealous, filled with self-righteousness, and indignant. Notice he says, “This son of yours,” not “my brother”, but “your son”. He had disowned his younger brother. If the story was just left there, we might conclude that the older brother got a raw deal, but the story does not end here.

“And he said to him, ‘My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’” -- I can picture the father as he took his arm and put it around his older son and said, “My son, you have always been with me and all that I have is yours.”

We tend to put all our emphasis upon the son who repented, but think very little about this older, faithful son. Think of the days, months and years that this younger son was away from God. Let’s say that the younger brother was twenty-five years old when he truly repented. He spent at least one-third of his life away from God. Let’s say that the older brother was thirty-one years old and was converted at age six. For twenty-five years, the older brother had walked with God. He had a quarter of a century over his younger brother in spiritual matters. Twenty-five years of fellowship with the Lord; twenty-five years of progressive sanctification. The older brother had a better knowledge of the Word of God; he also never had to carry a sinful life into his saved life. When people are deep in sin before conversion to Christ, they get forgiven of their sins and God blots the memory of the sins from His mind, but that sinful past can never be blotted from the minds of sinners. A sinful past haunts Christians to some degree all the days of their saved lives.

This should encourage young people who have been raised in Christian homes who say, “How can I be a dynamic Christian? I have never been on drugs, or had an affair, or boozed it up!” So what? Not to have done these things is to your advantage. These sinful things will never haunt you and you will adjust better in the Christian life. As long as you understand grace, you are saved whether you have done these gross things or not. As long as you know you are a sinner and have fled to Christ to save you, this is the important thing.

CONCLUSION

Where are you spiritually? Are you saved? Do you know your sins have been forgiven? Are you confident that you have eternal life and if you were to die today, you would go to heaven to be with Christ?

Are you interested in becoming a Christian? If you are, the way to become a Christian is to humbly admit you are a sinner under God's wrath and turn to Jesus Christ alone to deliver you from the guilt and penalty of sin. The moment you change your mind about Christ and receive Him as your Lord and Saviour, you shall be saved. The lost shall be found. You who were dead shall come to life.