

The Parables of Jesus #29
The Parable of the Lost Son
(Lk. 15:8-10)
Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (or Lost Son) is well-known

1. It is one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible
2. It is one of the most touching stories in the Bible
3. Almost everyone recognizes it as a story that gives great insight into the character and motives of God

B. We will actually have a mini-series within our series on parables

1. This story is a rich gold mine of education for the Lord's disciples
2. It can help us with some of the fundamental concepts we need to understand

C. Our first task is to see the story in its context

1. Like the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, it was meant to be an answer to the criticism of the Pharisees and scribes
2. More than anything, it should help us understand God's effort to save the lost
3. In subsequent lessons, we will relate various elements of the parable with lessons important for modern disciples

I. THE PARABLE (Summary)

A. There was a man who had two sons

1. Note: two sons -- yet we often only speak of the one who left home
2. Both sons are important to making the point of the story to the Pharisees and scribes
3. We'll come back to this later

B. The first part of the story centers on the younger son

1. He asked for his share of the inheritance even though he should have waited until his father's death
2. Soon he decided to leave home and go to a distant land
3. There he wasted his money living it up in a wild lifestyle
4. A famine hit magnifying his poverty -- now he was struggling to live
5. He took a job feeding pigs but was slowly starving
6. Then a significant event happened -- he came to his senses
 - a. here I am starving while my father's servants have food to spare
 - b. I'll go back and admit my sin
 - c. I'll admit I'm no longer worthy to be his son
 - d. I'll ask him for a job as one of his servants
7. Before he got all the way home, even while quite a distance away, his father saw him coming down the road
 - a. he was filled with compassion
 - b. he ran to meet him
 - c. he threw his arms around him
 - d. he kissed him
8. The son tried to admit his sin and that he no longer felt worthy to be called a son
9. The father was busy issuing orders
 - a. bring the best robe, a ring and shoes
 - b. kill the fattened calf
 - c. let's celebrate with a feast
10. The father stated his own mind about things
 - a. this son of mine was dead and is alive again
 - b. he was lost is is found
11. So they had a great celebration

B. The second part of the story centers on the older son

1. He was in the field when the younger son arrived
2. On his way home he heard the sound of music and dancing
3. He called one of the servants to find out what was happening
4. When he found out, he became angry and refused to go in
5. The father pleaded with his older son go join in the celebration
6. Instead the older son could only focus on himself
 - a. I've worked for you for all these years - never disobeyed
 - b. you never even gave me a goat to celebrate with my friends
 - c. then this son of yours who wasted everything with prostitutes comes home and you throw a party
7. The father tried to explain the celebration -- your brother was dead but is now alive -- he was lost is found!

II. UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLE

A. The characters of the story are obvious

1. God is the father
2. The younger son represents the sinners and tax collectors
3. The older son represents the Pharisees and scribes

B. The story explains, in a general sense, God's view of things

1. He sees the sinners and tax collectors as they truly are
 - a. he does not deny their sin
 - b. in fact he affirms the fact of their sins
 - c. he also affirms that some of them come to their senses and long to return to the Father, even if it means receiving only the leftovers of his blessings
2. He sees the Pharisees and scribes as they truly are
 - a. self-righteous and full of pride
 - b. self-centered and only concerned about themselves
 - c. hard-hearted with no compassion or openness for others
3. He sees the need to communicate some things about himself
 - a. he is a God of love
 - b. he is a God of compassion
 - c. he is a God who is approachable
 - d. he is a God of forgiveness
 - e. he is a God ready to restore his children
 - f. he is a God who celebrates and rejoices when his children return to him

C. You have to see things from God's point of view to understand Jesus

1. We keep reading the verses that explain Jesus' purpose
 - a. Matt 9:13
But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (NKJ)
 - b. Matt 18:11
For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. (NKJ)
 - c. Matt 20:28
just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (NKJ)
 - d. Luke 9:56
For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village. (NKJ)

e. John 10:10-11

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (NKJ)

2. If you do not understand God's view of things, you won't understand Jesus well

CONCLUSION

A. Why is this parable important to us?

1. Because we need to have a clear understanding of how God thinks and feels about mankind
2. Because we need to understand Jesus
3. Because we, too, can easily fall prey to the attitude displayed by Pharisees and scribes

B. The fact is that God's every effort is designed to save lost men

1. In the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, God's search for the lost is emphasized
2. In the parable of the lost son, his love, compassion and forgiveness is emphasized
3. God makes every effort to save those who are lost

C. Invitation