

Week of March 18-24

PARABLE OF THE LOST SONS

Scripture Reading: Read Luke chapter 15

Most believers are familiar with the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Even many unbelievers have heard the story of the young man who leaves home, loses everything along the way, comes to his senses and returns home to find restoration. This theme of redemption is a common one in Hollywood and finds its way into many movies.

Not many are as familiar, however, with the Parable of the Lost Sons. Have you heard of it? It's found in our chapter reading today right after the parables Jesus shares about the lost sheep and the lost coin. What? You don't see it? All you see is the Parable of the Lost Son? Ah, then you have found it. I haven't confused you, have I?

You see, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or Lost Son, is a story that doesn't have just one lost son, but two. Only one left home. The other son was lost at home. The first lost son was the prodigal. The second lost son was the elder brother. Look at his response to his father upon his brother's return in verses 28-30. He became angry and refused to enter the house. He couldn't understand why such a big fuss was being made and a fatted calf was killed on his brother's return when his brother had squandered everything. He felt his father was being unfair because he had not given him a celebration for being faithful to his father all those years. Notice, he can't even refer to his brother as a brother. Instead, he calls him, "this son of yours."

When the prodigal son was still a long way off, his father saw him (verse 20). This means he was looking for him. When his older son would not come into the house out of anger, the father came out looking for him as well. He sought to reassure his son of the privileges he had enjoyed being home with his father. He also sought to correct his son's sinful attitude by encouraging him to rejoice that "this brother of yours" was dead but is now alive, was lost but is now found.

Why did Jesus tell the story the way he did? Why two lost sons? If you go all the way back to the first two verses, you'll find your answer. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were muttering because Jesus was welcoming sinners and eating with them. In other words, these religious leaders were the elder brother in the story. They were angry with Jesus for receiving sinners while they had slaved away at keeping the law and, in their minds, remained faithful to God. They felt it was fundamentally unfair.

By telling this story, and not letting us know whether the second lost son came in to the house like the first son did, Jesus leaves the Pharisees and teachers of the law with a choice? Will they embrace grace and celebrate the salvation of the lost like the shepherd did (verse 6), like the woman did (verse 9), like the father did (verses 22-24)? Or, will they remain self-righteous, angry and bitter and refuse to enter in the Father's house? A few chapters later, we find our answer in the cries of "Crucify him!" Sadly, they missed out the celebration...and remained the other lost son!

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Do you rejoice when sinners are saved? Do you think it's unfair when someone gets saved on their deathbed after a life of sin? If so, spend time praying for the Father to give you his heart for the lost.

Take-away: *You don't have to leave home to be lost. You just need to miss grace.*