

The Lost Sheep/Coin/Son

Intro: Well good morning and welcome to church. We're so glad to have you with us this morning. If you're new here, my name is Seth and I'm one of the pastors here. Last week we had, as he put it, not one of the pastors but just a guy. But in all seriousness I want to thank Caleb for launching our series in the parables.

These parables of Jesus invite us into something deeper with him. A better understanding of the Kingdom and his mission. Klyne Snodgrass makes clear in his book *Stories with Intent* that no single definition of parables is sufficient, but with that in mind he says this, "Parables are much more than illustrations, and although some are concerned with future eschatology, they are not about heaven. They are directed to life on this earth."

When I was still living with my parents my dad used to make comments when he threw trash away like, "Man this trash can is really full. Someone should probably take it out." To this day, I still wonder who "someone" is.

When Katie and I got married something happened to the plate fairy. Do you guys know the plate fairy? When I lived at home I would finish a meal and then leave my plate literally anywhere and it would wind up back in the cabinets totally clean. But when I moved out of my parents house and got married that fairy must have retired. And Katie would remind me of this almost as if she was hoping I would do something about it. Not sure.

Later in our marriage Katie got into these really nerdy books and there was this ball happening, I think in Colorado? Anyway, she would tell me all about this ball and how awesome it would be to go to something like that. I still wonder if she wanted me to buy tickets.

I. The Ramp

- A. Why do I tell you those stories? What's the point? The point is that I have what we in the biz like to call "boy brain". It's the scientific inability for men to pick up on social queues from parents or spouses and it impacts 9 of every 10 men.
- B. Actually, I share these to share what Jesus is doing. In our passage today in Luke 15... That was your hint to start turning to Luke 15, y'all must have boy brain or something.
 1. Jesus shares three stories in quick succession and he's actually building a ramp. He's not using each of these stories to make a different point. He's using the three stories to build upon one another to make one point.
 2. But like Caleb said last week, in order to understand the parables we have to understand the context that led Jesus to share the parables. So if you haven't turned to Luke 15 I don't know what you're doing, but if you don't have a Bible we would love to gift you one at the Welcome Booth outside.
- C. **Luke 15:1-3** - Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable
 1. Sound familiar? Caleb actually preached from Luke 14 last week so we're literally in the very next chapter and the Pharisees clearly haven't learned their lesson. In chapter 14 the people have a messed up view of who is important and who is not and Jesus teaches that Kingdom of God will honor those who received no honor on earth.

2. Now, the Pharisees are muttering, “Can you believe this Jesus guy associates with tax collectors and sinners?” I can almost imagine Jesus rolling his eyes before going into these parables.
- D. **Luke 15:4-7** - “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.
1. Okay, so remember, parables are about action. What do we do here on earth based upon this illustration? Two things happen. You look for the lost sheep like your life depends on it, and then when you find it you throw a party. Okay, moving on.
- E. **Luke 15:8-10** - “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”
1. Once again, action. What do you do? You look for the lost coin like your life depends on it, and then you throw a party.
 2. Then we finally get to the parable that we’re actually going to focus on today:
- F. **Luke 15:11** - Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.
1. Okay okay, before we can dive into this one I want you to see the ramp that Jesus has built.
 2. The first story there are 100 sheep. One wanders off and you have 99 left. How valuable is that one sheep out of the 100? Obviously still pretty valuable since shepherds were willing to risk their lives to save these sheep.
 - a) And these sheep didn’t belong to a single shepherd, they would have been the sheep of an entire village. So when the other shepherds returned home they would have mentioned to the village that there was a lost sheep and one of the shepherds stayed behind to find it.
 - b) **William Barclay DSB said, “The whole village would be upon the watch, and when, in the distance, they saw the shepherd striding home with the lost sheep across his shoulders, there would rise from the whole community a shout of joy and of thanksgiving.”**
 3. Then the second story had a woman who lost one of ten coins. Now think about it. If one out of a hundred was that valuable then how valuable is one out of ten?
 - a) Losing a coin in your house is one thing, but imagine losing a coin in your house and you have no lights and only one window. Now you can imagine the frantic searching.

- b) Scholars say that this coin was either needed so desperately because it was worth more than an entire day's wage and the loss could result in the loss of food. Or this was one of the 10 coins worn on the headdress that would be our equivalent to a wedding ring. I've lost my wedding ring and when we found it everyone rejoiced and let out a huge sigh of relief.
4. Then Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son. So we have 1 of 100 sheep found, we rejoice. We have 1 of 10 coins found, we rejoice even more. Then Jesus simply says, a man has two sons. Do you see where this is going? Two things are happening. The value is getting higher, and based upon that, the party at the end is even greater.
- a) Now the problem is that whenever there's a story told we're so quick to put ourselves in the spot of the hero, right? I mean none of us watch Harry Potter and say, "Man I'm such a Voldemort." Sorry, I mean he who must not be named. We're always the hero of the story!
 - b) We're so quick to look at the Pharisees and point out what's wrong with them, but we have the benefit of hindsight. Here's where things get complicated though. I think that we put Jesus into this bottle where we think that if he came today we know exactly who he would be eating with: the tax collectors. And sure, we don't like them but we get that this is Jesus' thing.
 - (1) But really? That's really all you think Jesus would be eating with? Here's the easiest way to discern who Jesus would sit at a table with: consider who you would not sit at a table with. Whoever that is, Jesus is at their table.
 - (2) Maybe today that means that Jesus is sitting with people from the LGTBQ community, maybe he's eating with child traffickers, maybe he's eating with the woman who had an abortion.
 - (3) I kind of think that Jesus would be sitting eating with them if he was here today, calling them to his kingdom. And how many of us would be muttering, "I can't believe he's eating with them."
 - (a) The Pharisees aren't just straight up bad guys. They're people who are trying to follow Yahweh and are really passionate about the Scriptures. You know who else is trying to follow Yahweh and is really passionate about the Scriptures? ME! So there's actually a lot I can learn from these interactions with the Pharisees.
 - i) Because honestly, the way we feel about the Pharisees today, maybe those are the people Jesus would be eating with.
 - ii) The people most strongly rejected by the church. The people we've defined as "wrong". Those are the people Jesus so desperately seems to seek to save.
 - (b) Human life, no matter what kind of person is behind it, is sacred. It is of the utmost value. And when that human life invites Jesus to their table, we should celebrate. Period. Because we know what Jesus can do. So knowing where we probably stand in this story, and just accepting that for what it is, let's continue the parable.

II. The Younger Son

- A. **Luke 15:11-20** - Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father.
- B. The value keeps getting higher. It's now one of two sons. He asks his father for his inheritance, which likely would have been a third of what the father owned.
1. What's crazy is that this guy says that he wants his money so much that he would prefer for his dad to be dead so that he could just go ahead and have it now. And his dad doesn't even seem to bat an eye. He just goes ahead with giving his youngest son his inheritance.
 2. And just as the sheep in the first story wandered off, now, so too, does the youngest son wander off. He's lost. He spends his money quickly and finds himself in the most shameful position one could possibly find themselves in in that culture.
 - a) He didn't do anything illegal by asking his father for the money, but if there was anyone that we wouldn't want to sit at a table with, it's someone like this.
 - b) He's mistreated his family, he's lived recklessly, and now he's eating with pigs.
 3. There was a guy I went to high school with named Gavin. He was one of the cool kids, class clown but even the teachers thought he was funny. If I had to guess (which generally isn't good to do) I would guess that his family was pretty well off because he always came to school in some of the best clothes. I'm pretty sure it was part of the reason he was popular.
 - a) But one day nearly a decade after graduation I saw him again. He was dirty and wearing a blue jumpsuit. We chatted a little and I found out that he was working full time at a cemetery digging graves.
 - b) This guy who seemed like he had it all. Like he was going to be the big shot for the rest of his life. I don't know what happened, but I know that I never expected him to be digging graves for work.
 4. We don't have shame the same way that they did in this culture, Caleb touched on that some last week, so we don't fully understand that the way this son acted wasn't shameful like digging graves. Digging graves isn't shameful in our culture, it's a job, but in some cultures it's absolutely shameful because you're working with the dead. This exceeded even that shame and meant that no one, and I mean no one, would associate with him. He was utterly alone. So he decided to come home and beg his dad to take him in as a slave.

C. **Luke 15:20-24** - “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

1. Tim Keller, one of the most influential pastors of the past generation, once called this, not the story of the prodigal son, but of the prodigal father.
2. The son doesn’t even get the chance to ask the father to take him as a servant. The Father sees him in the distance and runs after him. This would have been wildly undignified and shameful for the father to do. Real men don’t run. A real man would have rebuked this wicked son. A real man would have told this son he’s gotten exactly what he deserves.
 - a) But not this father. This father charges towards him. This father puts a ring on his finger, robes around him, and shoes on his feet.
 - b) And he captures it so beautifully when he says that his son who was *dead* is now *alive*.
 - (1) And just like before, they began to celebrate. But this celebration was huge. There’s a whole party because the lost son has come home.
 - (2) The problem is that he’s not the only son in the story.

III. The Older Son

A. **Luke 15:25-32** - “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”

- B. Have you stopped to wonder why Jesus didn’t end this story at the celebration like he did with the other two? This one ends with a disgruntled older brother. I think it’s because in telling these parables Jesus is trying to show the Pharisees that they’re also among the lost.
1. While the younger brother and everyone else go inside to celebrate the party who is it that remains outside? It’s the older brother.

2. Diane Chen (NTC) said, "As a triptych of parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son are meant to be interpreted together. In increasing severity, the lostness progresses from one out of a hundred, to one of ten, and finally one of two. One may even find in the third parable two lost sons in need of reconciliation with their father. Without Jesus, the loss is total-two out of two."
- C. This is where really need to do the hard work to figure out what action it is that Jesus is wanting from us.
1. It's interesting to me that when the younger brother basically told his father that he would be better off dead the father just seemed to go along with it. We would have expected him to plead with his son, to tell him the errors of his ways, to beg him to come to his senses.
 2. Instead he lets him go off on his own and find himself in misery until the text literally says that he eventually came to his senses.
 - a) The older brother, however, this is the one that the father actually comes and finds him, the father then pleads with him, begging him to come in to the party.
 - b) You know what I find most interesting about this? Jesus seems to think that it is the people who think they are most deserving of his grace that will miss out on it.
 3. The Pharisees were devoted worshipers of God, and yet as God stood in their midst they refused to eat with him. The older son was devoted and obedient to the father, but when he saw that that devotion didn't earn him his father's affection he was furious. Those of us who make going to church a part of lives probably have a decent amount in common with the Pharisees. This is a warning to us. This is a warning that we not become the older brother. That we would see and celebrate the salvation of the lost.
 - a) So then what happens to the older brother? We don't know. It's almost as if Jesus intentionally ends the story before the end. He ends early so that we might write the true ending. Will the older brother come inside to the party? Or will he allow bitterness to consume him and take him down a darker path than his brother journeyed?
 - b) See, there might be someone here today who identifies with the younger brother. You've taken everything life has given you and you've run with it. You've enjoyed everything you could but you found it all lacking. You found yourself wallowing in a pit of shame and now you're wondering if coming back home is even an option. The truth is that it's absolutely an option. As long as there's breath in your lungs you can come home to God. Today is your opportunity for that. How do you come home? The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead then you will be saved.
 - (1) But I think that most of in here actually identify with the older brother. We see the body of Christ, the global church, sitting and eating with people that we think we should never associate with. We mutter about them eating with those others.

- (2) Jesus is looking at us and saying, “My son, my daughter, don’t you understand? Your brother was dead, but now he’s alive! He was lost but now he’s found!”
- c) There was apparently something about Jesus that led these sinners and tax collectors to invite him to their tables. What do you think that something was? And what would it look like for you to have that something? Jesus seems to be inviting us, through these parables, to become more like him. To become the kind of person who is gentle, gracious, and celebrates anyone who is interested in meeting Jesus.

Takeaways:

1. **Invite someone new to your table**
2. **Look for and celebrate resurrection life.** Stop muttering. We get so hung up on how holy someone is, we need them to prove that they’ve really come to Jesus. What if we just saw an interaction with Jesus and trusted that Jesus is going to do more with that interaction than we expect?
3. **Look for the lost.** Look for the ones no one else is looking for. Don’t just carry Jesus into places that are dim, carry him to the darkest depths. The places we pretend don’t exist.