

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 10, 2012

LESSON 135: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 15

This chapter is one of the most beloved chapters in the book of Luke, consisting of three “lost-and-found” parables—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Jesus tells them in response to the Pharisee’s complaints about Jesus eating with sinners. The message of these parables shows us the heart of God.

Luke 15:1-2 Now all the tax collectors and sinners kept coming to listen to Jesus. (2) But the Pharisees and the scribes kept complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

- The Pharisees had a real problem associating with anyone they felt did not keep the Law as they did. They even had a name for them – they were called the “People of the Land”, and they set a strict barrier between them and themselves. If you let your daughter marry someone like that, it was like giving her tied up to a lion.
- Of course, the Pharisees had rules for these people. "When a man is one of the People of the Land, entrust no money to him, take no testimony from him. Trust him with no secret, do not appoint him guardian of an orphan, do not make him the custodian of charitable funds, do not accompany him on a journey." A Pharisee was forbidden to be the guest of any of these people or to have them as his guest. He was even forbidden, if possible, to have any business dealings with him.
- It was the goal of the Pharisee to avoid every contact with people who did not observe the petty details of the law. So, it’s understandable why they were so upset with Jesus about Him hanging out with sinners. Pharisees didn’t look forward to the saving of the sinner, but to his being obliterated by God.

Luke 15:3-7 So he told them this parable: (4) "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. He leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness and looks for the one that is lost until he finds it, doesn't he? (5) When he finds it, he puts it on his shoulders and rejoices. (6) Then he goes home, calls his friends and neighbors together, and says to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep!' (7) In the same way, I tell you that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance."

- Shepherds were personally responsible for their sheep. If a sheep was lost they had to bring back evidence to show how it died. They were experts at tracking and could follow the sheep’s footprints for miles across the hills. And risking his life for the sheep was just part of the job.
- Many of the flocks belonged to the village, not to individuals. If news came back to the village that a sheep was lost, the whole village would be on the lookout until they saw the shepherd coming home with that sheep across his shoulders, and then they would celebrate the finding of the lost sheep.
- Jesus is telling us this is what God is like, He is as glad as a shepherd who finds a lost sheep. God also

loves the people who never stray away, but His heart is full of joy when a lost one is found and comes home. And he will search for that lost sheep until he is found.

Luke 15:8-10 "Or suppose a woman has ten coins and loses one of them. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds it, doesn't she? (9) When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I lost!' (10) In the same way, I tell you that there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents."

- The Parable of the Lost Coin teaches that there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels when a sinner repents, or when a rebellious believer comes back to God. This is the same message as the first but it brings out how persistently God pursues people. The woman continued to sweep the house and search carefully until she found the coin. A drachma, a Greek silver coin, equaled about a day's wages. The point would have been clear to Jesus' listeners: the sinners He was spending time with were extremely valuable to God.
- No Pharisee had ever dreamed of a God like that. The Jew might have agreed that if a man came humbly crawling to God and prayed for mercy he might get it; but he would never have conceived of a God who went out to search for sinners. We believe in the seeking love of God, because we see that love personified in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 15:11-13 Then Jesus said, "A man had two sons. (12) The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So the father divided his property between them. (13) A few days later, the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country. There he wasted his possessions on wild living.

- This has been called the greatest short story ever written. Under Jewish law a father was bound to give his oldest son two thirds of his estate and the other third went to the rest of the children. (Deuteronomy 21:17). Now, it was not unusual for a father to distribute his estate before he died, if he wanted to retire from running it. But his younger son was basically saying, "Give me my inheritance now that I'm going to get when you die anyway so I can get out of here."
- Notice the father didn't argue or keep him from leaving. He knew that if his son was going to learn, it would have to be the hard way, and he gave him what he wanted.
- The younger son took that money, went far away, and wasted it in wild living, living the "high life", or whatever you want to call it. The listeners immediately would have begun to understand the point of the story. Jesus had been criticized for associating with sinners. The sinners were considered people who were far away from God, wasting their lives in lawless living.

Luke 15:14-19 After he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. (15) So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. (16) He would gladly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. (17) "Then he came to his senses and said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more food than they can eat, and here I am starving to death! (18) I will get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. (19) I don't deserve to be called your son anymore. Treat me like one of your hired men.'"

- A famine happened in that region and the son ran out of money so that he had to work for a foreigner feeding pigs, something that would be abominable to a Jew. This area would have been east of the Sea of Galilee where Gentiles kept pigs (see 8:26-37). He got so hungry that the stuff he was feeding the pigs started looking very good. As a Jew, that was about as low as he could get (the law said, "Cursed is he who feeds swine."). The "husks" were probably carob pods, from tall evergreen carob trees.
- Notice he "came to his senses". When we allow ourselves to get caught up in sinful living, it does terrible things to us. It makes us see the world incorrectly. It makes us see ourselves in the wrong light. It just makes it so we can't see clearly, our perspective is fouled up. Sometimes it takes hitting bottom before we "come to our senses", and that's what happened with this young man.

Luke 15:20-24 "So he got up and went to his father. While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him affectionately. (21) Then his son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore.' (22) But the father said to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23) Bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let's eat and celebrate! (24) For my son was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

- The robe stands for honor; the ring for authority. If a man gave you his signet ring it was the same as giving him the power of attorney. The shoes show he was accepted as his son as opposed to a slave, because children of the family wore shoes and slaves did not.
- The father had obviously been waiting for his son to return, because while he was still a long way off the father saw him. The son was coming home and he had a long speech prepared; and his father never gave him the chance to use it. He ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him.
- Jesus uses the banquet motif again. He had previously spoken of a banquet to symbolize the coming kingdom (13:29; 14:15-24). Jesus' hearers would have easily realized the significance of this feast. Sinners (symbolized by the young son) were entering into the kingdom because they were coming to God. They believed they needed to return to Him and be forgiven by Him.
- However, I believe today's message of this parable, that Luke wanted us to see, is meant for believers, people who have already been saved but have wandered away from God, and have been caught up into sin. This younger son was already a son of the Father. All the time he spent in wild living, and all the time he spent in the mud with the pigs, he was still his father's son. Nothing could change that.
- All the time this was going on, at the father's house the father was watching for his son to come home, knowing that it would happen! He was saying, "My son doesn't like pigpens because he is not a pig; he is a son of mine. He has my nature, and he won't be happy until he's back in my house. And every one of my children who goes to a far country and gets into a pigpen, no matter how dirty he gets, or how low he sinks, one day he will say, 'I will get up, and go to my father'. All my children are coming home."
- Under the Mosaic Law a father had the perfect right to bring a disobedient son before the elders and have him stoned to death. This son had wasted everything the father had given him, and disgraced his name. At the least he should have whipped him within an inch of his life. And that's what we would expect, wouldn't we? That boy deserved to be punished. But the father forgave him immediately.
- What a picture of our heavenly father! When we run from Him, and go our own way, even get into a pigpen, there will come a day when we realize that we need to go back home, and when we do, we will

confess our sins to Him, and He will always be faithful to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us (1 John 1:9). That's how a child who has rebelled against His Father gets back into fellowship with Him.

- When we confess, the Father will embrace us, place the robe of the righteousness of Christ on us that covers us, and place the ring on our finger that shows that we are restored to our original position in His house. A son is a son forever.

Luke 15:25-32 "Now his older son was in the field. As he was coming back to the house, he heard music and dancing. (26) So he called to one of the servants and asked what was happening. (27) The servant told him, 'Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he got him back safely.' (28) "Then the older son became angry and wouldn't go into the house. So his father came out and began to plead with him. (29) But he answered his father, "Listen! All these years I've worked like a slave for you. I've never disobeyed a command of yours. Yet you've never given me so much as a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. (30) But this son of yours spent your money on prostitutes, and when he came back, you killed the fattened calf for him!' (31) "His father said to him, 'My child, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. (32) But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and has been found.'"

- The older brother symbolizes the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They did not like the idea that people from outside their nation as well as outcasts and sinners in the nation were to be a part of the kingdom. Like the older son who refused to go to the feast, the Pharisees refused to enter the kingdom Jesus offered to the nation.
- Interestingly the father went out and pleaded with the older brother to go to the party. Jesus ate with Pharisees as well as sinners. He did not want to exclude the Pharisees and teachers of the Law from the kingdom. The message was an invitation to everyone.
- Verse 29 shows the Pharisees' attitude. They thought they had a relationship with God because of their work for him. Like the elder son, they served the Father not out of love but out of a desire for reward. He even thought of his work as being like a slave in bondage, which reveals also the Pharisees attitude. And notice he didn't even consider the younger one his brother ("this son of yours")
- The father pointed out that the older son had had the joy of being in the house all the time, and now he should rejoice with the father in his brother's return. Verse 31 represents the fact that the Jews had a privileged position as God's Chosen People. They were the recipients and guardians of the covenants and the Law (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4). Instead of feeling angry, they should rejoice that others were joining them and would be a part of the kingdom.
- Final thoughts about this parable:
 - It is called the parable of the Prodigal son, but it should have been called, "The parable of the loving father." The son is not the hero, the father is. The point is not so much the son's sin, but about the father's love.
 - It tells us a lot about the forgiveness of God. When the son came home, the father immediately forgave him with no questions, no accusations, and no conditions. That is the love of God, folks! Also read Psalm 103:10-13.

Chapter 16

This chapter includes two parables about wealth. The first parable (verses 1-13) was spoken mostly to the disciples (verse 1). The second parable (verses 19-31) was directed to the Pharisees because of their response

(verses 14-18) to the first parable.

Luke 16:1-3 Now Jesus was saying to the disciples, "A rich man had a manager who was accused of wasting his assets. (2) So he called for him and asked him, 'What's this I hear about you? Give me a report about your management, because you can't be my manager any longer.' (3) "Then the manager said to himself, 'What should I do? My master is taking my position away from me. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg.

- In Jesus' day managers were often hired by wealthy people to care for the finances of their estates. They would be like a modern-day financial planner or trustee who controls the finances of an estate for the purpose of making more money for that estate. So this guy was a bad manager of his boss's estate, and was going to be fired. He didn't repent or show any remorse, but he comes up with a plan:

Luke 16:4-8 I know what I'll do so that people will welcome me into their homes when I'm dismissed from my job.' (5) "So he called for each of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' (6) The man replied, 'A hundred jars of olive oil.' The manager told him, 'Get your bill. Sit down quickly and write "fifty."' (7) Then he asked another debtor, 'How much do you owe?' The man replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' The manager told him, 'Get your bill and write "eighty."' (8) The master praised the dishonest manager for being so clever. For worldly people are more clever than enlightened people in dealing with their own generation.

- What? This guy is a crook! He was ashamed to beg, but apparently not ashamed to steal! He should have been sent to prison for this, but his boss praises him for being clever. Apparently his boss was also a crook, and respected him for being as devious as he was! Jesus is saying this is the way the world is, and worldly people, generally, have more material success because they understand the way the world works. So, what is the message to us here? Jesus goes on:

Luke 16:9-13 "I'm telling you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous riches, so that when they're gone you'll be welcomed into eternal homes. (10) Whoever is faithful with very little is also faithful with a lot, and whoever is dishonest with very little is also dishonest with a lot. (11) So if you have not been faithful with unrighteous riches, who will trust you with true wealth? (12) And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to foreigners, who will give you what is your own? (13) "No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate one and love the other, or be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and riches!"

- Jesus told this Parable of the Unjust Manager to teach that His disciples must use their wealth for kingdom purposes. The dishonest manager had not done a good thing. Jesus was not teaching that His disciples should be dishonest. He was teaching that they should use their worldly wealth for future spiritual benefit. This was a good lesson from a bad example.
- Believers should act in a shrewd (wise, not dishonest) manner. Jesus was saying that one is to use wealth for His kingdom, not store it up or be a servant of it. Wealth should be a disciple's servant, not vice versa. The disciples were to use wealth to gain friends; the same reason the dishonest manager used the rich man's wealth. The disciples' wise use of wealth would help lead others to believe the message of the kingdom and bring them to accept that message.
- Jesus' second application is in verses 10-12. If one is faithful in his use of money, then he can be trusted

with greater things. True riches (v. 11) seem to refer to the kingdom's spiritual riches of which the disciples will partake. The third application Jesus drew from the parable was that a person cannot serve both God and money (v 13). As masters the two are mutually exclusive. Love for money will drive one away from God (1 Tim. 6:10); conversely, loving God will cause one not to make money his primary concern in life.

- If only the Christian was as eager and ingenious in building treasure in heaven as the worldly person is in trying to get money and comfort, he would be a much better man. If only people would give as much attention to the things which concern their souls as they do to the things which concern their business, they would be much better off. A person will spend twenty times the amount of time and money and effort on his pleasure, his hobby, his garden, his sport as he does on his church.
- In Luke 16:10-11 the lesson is that a man's way of fulfilling a small task is the best proof of his fitness or unfitness to be entrusted with a bigger task. That is clearly true of earthly things. No man will be advanced to higher office until he has given proof of his honesty and ability in a smaller position. But Jesus extends the principle to eternity. He says, "Upon earth you are in charge of things which are not really yours. You cannot take them with you when you die. They are only lent to you. You are only a steward over them. They cannot, in the nature of things, be permanently yours. On the other hand, in heaven you will get what is really and eternally yours. And what you get in heaven depends on how you use the things of earth. What you will be given as your very own will depend on how you use the things of which you are only steward." (William Barclay)

Luke 16:14-18 Now the Pharisees, who love money, had been listening to all this and began to ridicule Jesus. (15) So he said to them, "You try to justify yourselves in front of people, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly valued by people is detestable to God. (16) "The law and the Prophets were prophesying until the time of John. Since then, the good news about the kingdom of God has been proclaimed, and everyone is trying to enter it by force. (17) However, it is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped. (18) Any man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

- The Pharisees sneered at Jesus because they saw Him as a poor man being followed by other poor men and having the nerve to teach about money. The Jew tended to connect earthly prosperity with goodness; wealth was a sign that a man was a good man. Jesus responded that God knows the hearts of people and is not impressed with their outward appearances or their wealth. Though the Pharisees tried to justify themselves, God, who judges the heart of a person, will be their ultimate Judge.
- The Pharisees misunderstood the blessings of God's covenant. They apparently assumed that a person's wealth was God's blessing in return for his righteous behavior. They completely ignored the fact that many righteous people in the Old Testament were not wealthy at all, while many unrighteous people had plenty.
- Before Jesus the law and the prophets had been the final word of God; but Jesus came preaching the kingdom. When he did, the most unlikely people, the tax-collectors and the sinners, came storming their way into the kingdom even when the scribes and Pharisees would have set up barriers to keep them out. But Jesus stressed that the kingdom was not the end of the law.
- What Jesus said in verse 17 reminds us of what He said in Matthew:

Matthew 5:17-18 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I didn't come to destroy them, but to fulfill them. (18) For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not one letter or one stroke of a letter will disappear from the Law until everything has been accomplished.

- The law isn't going away, but Jesus is the one who will fulfill every last bit of it.
- In Luke 16:19 Jesus gives an example to the Pharisees of how they are not obeying the law. In the eyes of Jewish Pharisaical law a woman was a thing. She could divorce her husband only if he became a leper or an apostate or if he raped a virgin. Otherwise a woman had no rights. The law said, "A woman may be divorced with or without her will; a man only with his will." The Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 24:1) said, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house." The bill of divorce had to be signed before two witnesses and ran, "Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt." Divorce was as simple and easy as that.
- It all depended on how the Mosaic regulation was interpreted. There were two schools of thought. The school of Shammai said that "indecency" meant adultery and that's it. The school of Hillel said it could mean "if she spoiled a dish of food; if she spun in the street; if she talked to a strange man; if she was guilty of speaking disrespectfully of her husband's relations in his hearing; if she was a brawling woman," which was defined as a woman whose voice could be heard in the next house. Rabbi Akiba went so far as to say that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman who was more attractive. Knowing how we men think, it is no wonder which view became the most predominant. In the time of Jesus things were so bad that women were refusing to marry at all and family life was in danger.

The chapter finishes with another great parable by Jesus that only Luke tells. Many think that this story was taken from real life, it really happened.

Luke 16:19-31 "Once there was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and live in great luxury every day. (20) A beggar named Lazarus, who was covered with sores, was brought to his gate. (21) He was always craving to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table. In fact, even the dogs used to come and lick his sores. (22) "One day the beggar died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) In the afterlife, where he was in constant torture, he looked up and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus by his side. (24) So he shouted, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and to cool off my tongue, because I am suffering in this fire.' (25) But Abraham said, 'My child, remember that during your lifetime you received blessings, while Lazarus received hardships. But now he is being comforted here, while you suffer. (26) Besides all this, a wide chasm has been fixed between us, so that those who want to cross from this side to you can't do so, nor can they cross from your side to us.' (27) "The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house- (28) for I have five brothers-to warn them, so that they won't end up in this place of torture, too.' (29) Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets. They should listen to them!' (30) But the rich man replied, 'No, father Abraham! Yet if someone from the dead went to them, they would repent.' (31) Then Abraham said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded, even if someone rises from the dead.'"

- Death is separation, it never means extinction.
- One reason it is thought that Jesus was relating a real event is He gives us the beggar's name. No other parable includes personal names. It shows us that people will know each other in heaven; we won't lose our personal identities. At the same time the rich man is left unnamed, suggesting that personal identities are forgotten in hell. "The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot" (Proverbs 10:7).
- "Carried away by the angels". When a believer dies, he does not die alone. Angels have guarded him in his life (Hebrews 1:14), and they will escort his spirit in death, bringing him to the presence of the Lord.
- "Abraham's side" (also called "paradise") - In the age before the cross and Christ's victory over sin and death, the spirits of believers were transported, not to heaven, but to a separate compartment in the depths of the earth, to rest in peace waiting for the coming of Christ "and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isaiah 61:1). These faithful people were apparently under the care of "Father Abraham" (verse 24). Paradise was emptied out when Christ took all the Old Testament believers with Him at His ascension (Ephesians 4:8-10).
- Verse 23, translated "the afterlife" here, and "hell" in some translations, literally is "Hades" in the original Greek (equal to the Hebrew Sheol). Hades is not ultimate hell (Greek Gehenna) referred to in Matthew 10:28, the same as the "lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). Hades is another compartment in the depths of the earth, where the spirits of the unsaved dead are confined, until the Day of Judgment. They were not set free, of course, when Christ freed the spirits of the faithful, but are still there. These people will be taken to the Great White Throne judgment (see Revelation 20:11-15), and from there all of them will be cast into the Lake of Fire, which is the second death.
- "Hell" (Gehenna, the Lake of Fire) is a different place than Hades, and it is not open for business yet. Revelation 20:10 tells us that the first occupants will be the antichrist and the false prophet.
- At the death of believers today, since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, their spirits go to be with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). The spirits of unbelievers still go to Hades. After it is emptied out at the Great White Throne judgment, Hades itself will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14). Heaven, Hades, and Hell are real places! God never intended that any person go to Hell – it was created for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). But you are allowed to choose your final destination. Will you choose to be with Christ in heaven?
- "Abraham far away" - Although the two compartments were separated from each other, you could apparently see and communicate from one side to the other. This also tells us that disembodied spirits are somehow still recognizable and are able to communicate, even though we can't understand this.
- Luke 16:24 Father Abraham. Abraham was also a rich man; so obviously the criteria for comfort or torment after death are not just being rich or poor, which was Jesus' point.
- Water. Since it seems physically impossible—at least to our limited understanding—that that disembodied spirits could feel either tormenting fire or cooling water in these places deep in the earth, it is possible that both are spiritual. That is, the fires may be the burning flames of a tormented conscience and hopeless future; and the waters are the waters of eternal life and perfect rest. Once this life is past, though, there is an impassable gulf between (verse 26), so your destiny is already set for eternity.
- "Suffering in this fire" - Lazarus had begged for crumbs from the rich man; now the rich man begged for a drop of water from Lazarus.