**Lost Sons**

Luke 15:11-32

Key Verse 32

“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.”

**Introduction**

Today’s passage is Jesus’ parable of lost sons. This parable shows the Heavenly Father’s unconditional acceptance and joy towards a sinner’s repentance. There are three points highlighted in the passage: the prodigal pictured as the sinner, the older son symbolizing self-righteous Pharisees who criticized Jesus, and the Father is a picture of God. It is the father’s response to his two sons that is at the center of this parable. God shows his unconditional love for his two sons. Let’s look at this parable from the forgiving father’s point of view to understand God’s love.

1. Read verses 11-12. What did the younger son want from his father and what does this show about him? (11, 12a) What was the father’s response and how was this response unusual in Jewish culture? (12b; Dt. 21:18-21; Ps 145:8)

1-1. Read verses 11-12.

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

1-2. What did the younger son want from his father and what does this show about him? (11, 12a)

***Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’***

* The story begins with the younger son’s request for his share of the estate.
* We can imagine that the boy is probably in his late teens.
* According to Jewish law, the younger son would receive half of what the elder son receives, or one third of the estate.
* Probably the father had instructed his younger son with many “do’s and don’ts.”
* But the young boy thought that his father was too restricted and restrained. He felt that his father bothered him too much.
* Now he reached his legal age and asked his father, “Give me my share.” Whatever the reason, he decided to separate himself from his father.
* He wanted to break his relationship with his father and go away. He was thoughtless and selfish. He didn’t mind breaking his father’s heart.

1-3. What was the father’s response and how was this response unusual in Jewish culture? (12b; Dt. 21:18-21; Ps 145:8)

***So he divided his property between them.***

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 reads,

**“**If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, **19** his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. **20** They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” **21** Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.”

* His request might have made his father mad. He could have rebuked him for his rude request.
* But his father granted his request. He loved his son and knew that his son would not listen to his counsel.
* So he gave his younger son his share of the estate. He did not try to control his son with money.

Psalm 145:8 reads,

“The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.”

* The younger son’s request was graciously granted. He respected his son and recognized his freedom of choice.
* It was the heart of God who gave man freedom.

God said in Gen 2:16,

“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.”

* God gave man freedom to choose. This image is a picture of the heavenly Father letting the sinner go his own way.

2. Read verses 13-21. What did the younger son do after gaining his freedom? (13-16) What plan did he make and what did he do when he came to his senses? (17-20a) What might the father have been doing? (20b; 2Pe 3:9 ) What did he do as soon as he saw his son? What does this tell us about the father? What did the younger son confess and why was this important? (21, 1Jn 1:8-10)

2-1. Read verses 13-21.

“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. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. **17** “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! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ **20** So he got up and went to his father. “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. **21** “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

2-2. What did the younger son do after gaining his freedom? (13-16)

***“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.***

* The younger son left home and set off for a distant country. He must have said, “I am now free.”
* In order to enjoy his freedom, he converted all his inheritance into cool cash. The word “squander” is “diaskorpizo” in Greek, meaning “to scatter or disperse.”
* He could have thrown away his money through an undisciplined, wild life. He had a spending spree for things of no value.
* Though he gained independence, he did not use his freedom to seek the truth or build his future. He must have used his freedom to enjoy his sinful life.
* Though he wanted to enjoy freedom away from his father, he was not free. He became a slave of his sinful desire.
* He probably enjoyed a pleasure-seeking, care-free life with prostitutes in the distant country.
* One day he woke up to find that his money was all spent. His life collapsed soon after he left home and his father.

***“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need.”***

* This young man did not understand the hardness of the world. Now he began to be in need. He began to understand the harsh reality of life.

***“So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.”***

* With no money, no family, and suffering in a distant land, he called his drinking buddies using facebook messages, but nobody answered him.
* When he had no money, all his friends deserted him one by one.
* But due to the severe famine, the unemployment rate was unusually high and no one offered him a job.
* So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to take care of his pigs.
* This was the most disgusting work for a Jew, for the pigs were unclean animals.

Leviticus 11:7-8 reads,

**“**and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you.You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.”

***“He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”***

* Maybe he began to fight with the pigs over the pods. As he rolled around in the mud, he felt he had become a pig.
* He degraded himself from a privileged son of the loving father to an animal man longing for the pods.
* He liked to be alone and free. Now he needed his father’s love. The father is a symbol of security and we need a father-son relationship.
* He paid the price of his sinful life after cutting off his relationship with his father at home.

Ephesians 2:3 reads,

“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

* When we leave God out of our life for the sake of human freedom, we end up gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature.
* Many young people want to be far away from home to enjoy their freedom to the maximum.
* But many of them became slaves of their sinful nature and returned home after they failed.
* Today, many Americans are hungry spiritually and are starved to death because they are alienated from God.
* After leaving their loving heavenly Father, they seek after the cravings of their sinful nature and became objects of God’s wrath.
* Here our true home is God himself. When we are in God, we are happy.

2-3. What plan did he make and what did he do when he came to his senses? (17-20a)

***“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!***

* The son’s plight finally made him realize how far he had fallen. He woke up from his depraved mind.
* His idea of enjoying total human freedom and pleasure was nothing but his own delusion.
* When he followed his own way of thinking, he came to a shameful end.
* Suddenly, when hit rock bottom, he remembered his life at home that he had never appreciated.
* Then he began to think about his father. He compared his situation to that of hired men in his father’s house.
* It was a complete change in his way of thinking. He had never thought this way before; now he made no attempt to justify or excuse his sin.
* He had a stark realization that his father’s hired men were in better shape than he was. These hired workers had plenty of food and were well cared for. In contrast, though he is a son, apart from his father he was perishing from hunger.
* The young man, for the first time, must have begun to respect his father out of the bottom of his heart.
* He also began to realize his father’s love. He began to think that his father was the most wonderful man in the world.
* Previously he had thought of his home as a prison but now he had a completely different perspective and a changed image of his father and home.
* How long might the father have waited till now without forcing his way through to his son?

***18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’***

* The story shifts from the external narration to internal motive. The son develops an action plan.
* The struggling son acknowledged that he first sinned against God. God came to his heart for the first time.
* He concluded that it’s better to be a father’s hired man than remain in a distant country, living a lower life than that of unclean pigs.
* He plans to come home, openly confessing his failure.
* His only request was simply to be made like one of his father’s hired men.
* When he left home, he requested, “Give me.” When he returned home, he requested, **“Make me.”**
* This reveals what repentance is all about, that is no claims, but just totally reliant on God’s mercy and provision.

***So he got up and went to his father.***

* So he set out to go back to his father’s house. This was not easy. Perhaps his heart sank as he came nearer his father’s house.
* He might have hesitated at the thought of passing before his hometown people and his father’s servants, or his brother.
* But nothing deterred his conversion experience. He departed and carried out his resolution to return home.
* Finally, a sinner decided to come home after having wandered in his own sins for a long time in the distant country.

2-4. What might the father have been doing? (20b; 2Pe 3:9 )

***“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.***

2 Peter 3:9 reads,

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

* This is the climax of this parable. The father did not say a word to his younger son but showed his love through his actions.
* The father spotted him while he was still far away. The father saw his son, before the son saw his father.
* Maybe his father opened his window and watched the road everyday. This shows that his father was waiting for him every day, looking for his son’s return.
* The shepherd in the first parable looked for his sheep until he found because the sheep wanted to be found.
* The woman was looking for the coin until it was found. But the younger did not want to be found.
* The only thing his father could do was to wait for him to come home. The father had undying hope for his son’s return.

2-5. What did he do as soon as he saw his son?

***“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.”***

* When he saw his son in the distance, he was filled with compassion for him. He did not remember the pain his son had caused him; the father had no thought of his own suffering.
* He only felt the pain in his son’s heart–the shame and humiliation, the sorrow and anxiety.
* The father’s only desire was to alleviate his son’s suffering and restore the relationship with him.
* The excited father ran to meet his hungry, ragged, and weary son. Probably, the prodigal son could not run, but his aging father forgot his age and dignity and ran to meet the wanderer.
* He threw his arms around him and gave him a giant hug and kissed him.
* The father did not say, “I told you son.” But he said, “Son, welcome home. I missed you so much.”
* The younger son said, “I am sorry, Dad. I missed you too.” What a glimpse we have into the heart of God.

2-6. What does this tell us about the father?

* The father’s show of affection was out of his genuine love. It was the father’s intention of letting his son know that he loved him.
* The father wanted to melt the doubt and anxiety in his son’s heart and restore their love relationship fully. This is what God has done for sinners.
* God sacrificed his one and only Son Christ to show his love for sinners like us. Praise God for his unfailing love for all of us.

2-7. What did the younger son confess and why was this important? (21, 1Jn 1:8-10)

***“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”***

1 John 1:8-10 reads,

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”

* Probably the son was in tears at his father’s embrace. He could have kept quiet and received his father’s love one-sidedly.
* But he did not want to take his father’s love for granted any longer. He felt compelled to apologize to his father.

***“He said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son’”***

3. Read verses 22-24. How then did the father respond? (22-24) What significance is there in the father giving his son a robe, a ring, sandals and preparing a fattened calf? From this display of the father’s love in this passage, what can we learn about our Heavenly Father? (Rom 5:8; Lk 5:31-32)

3-1. Read verses 22-24.

“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. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.**24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

3-2. How then did the father respond? (22-24)

***“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. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.***

3-3. What significance is there in the father giving his son a robe, a ring, sandals and preparing a fattened calf?

* The robe covered his beggar’s garments and made him look like a prince.
* The ring was a sign of recovering his position as the son.
* The sandals are also a symbol of wealth.
* A fattened calf might have already been prepared by his father who must have believed that his son would come some day and celebrate.
* The father accepted his son again with trust and clothed him with the honor and privilege of a son. The son goes from a life destroyed to a restored life.
* The picture of joy and triumph continues: the father calls for a celebration in honor of his son’s return.
* The father gives reason for celebration. The son has been alive again.
* The father has regained a “lost” son: the son he expected never to see again has returned.
* It is the heart of God for the lost. Here the father suffered more than his younger son.
* Jesus seldom called people sinners; but called them “lost.” Jesus ate with sinners and had fellowship with them.
* He wanted to restore them in the image of God.
* Many people are lost in sin, and God is waiting for them to come home. God sent Jesus to find them.
* In the previous two parables there was celebration when they found the lost sheep and coin.
* God was happy to accept sinners when they came home with repentance. He celebrates in heaven with the angels.
* In the same way, God accepts sinners as his own precious children through the grace of his Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:1 says,

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

3-4. From this display of the father’s love in this passage, what can we learn about our Heavenly Father? (Rom 5:8; Lk 5:31-32)

Romans 5:8 reads,

**“**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Luke 5:31-32 reads,

**“**Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. **32** I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

* This passage shows the joy of a forgiving God over a forgiven man, and the joy of a forgiven man in a forgiving God.
* Our forgiving heavenly Father welcomes us to his home with his kiss of love and restores us to share his eternal inheritance.
* It is hard to forgive others who wronged us. It is easy to remember bad things about others and hard to remember good things.
* But God forgave our sins and welcomed us to his kingdom.

4. Read verses 25-32. What might have made the older son upset? (25-27) What did the father do for the older son? (28) How did the older son complain to his father? (29, 30) How did the father correct him? (31) What further explanation did he give for celebrating the return of his younger son? (32) What can we learn about God’s loving heart?

4-1. Read verses 25-32.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ **28** “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.**29** 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. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ **31** “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** 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.’”

4-2. What might have made the older son upset? (25-27)

***“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’***

* The story of the prodigal son could have ended with the younger son coming home.
* But the story continued, for metaphorically, the elder son went out into a distant country of self-righteousness and resentment.
* Though he was near his father, he was lost spiritually because his heart was far from his father.
* The older son’s problem was more serious because he was not aware that he was lost. He was self-righteous and legalistic.
* He did not know his father’s broken heart or his father’s joy at the younger son’s return. To him, the joyful celebration was a bitter event.

4-3. What did the father do for the older son? (28)

***28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.***

* The father pleaded with his older son.

4-4. How did the older son complain to his father? (29, 30)

***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. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’***

* The older son was spiritually blind. He needed to realize his father’s love. He needed to understand the suffering of his younger brother.

4-5. How did the father correct him? (31)

***“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.***

4-6. What further explanation did he give for celebrating the return of his younger son? (32)

***32 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.’”***

* The father said to him, “we” had to celebrate. His father wanted him to rejoice over his younger brother’s return.
* So Jesus wanted the Pharisees to rejoice over the salvation of lost sinners instead of muttering in resentment. This is possible when we know the heart of God.

4-7. What can we learn about God’s loving heart?

* God’s loving heart is based on selfless and genuine love for his sons.
* It is not based on human expectation or calculation.
* Rather it is purely sacrificial love for them.

**Conclusion**

Praise God who lavishes His love for us until we may come back to Him with repentance. May the Lord help us to know His love in this arid world so that we may put into practice God’s love for the lost. Amen.

**One Word: God’s heart for the lost**