

Was Lost and Has Been Found 2022  
 Jonah 3:5, 10-4:4 Luke 15:1-3, 25-32

### Jonah 3:5, 10-4:4 (New Revised Standard Version)

And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

### Luke 15:1-3, 25-32 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'

There are many insightful and inspiring chapters in the Bible,  
 and Luke 15 is an especially clear proclamation of the Gospel  
 in which Jesus describes the amazing wonder of God's grace.

The setting is that the religious authorities object to Jesus  
 because he shows mercy to sinners and outcasts, vs. 1-2

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So Jesus tells religious teachers and leaders a series of parables  
 to explain God's grace, his welcome & mercy toward of lost sinners.

1<sup>st</sup> parable, Jesus describes a shepherd who leaves the 99 of his flock  
 to find a lost sheep that has wandered off alone into the wilderness,  
 and the good shepherd searches until it has been found,  
 then hoists it up onto his shoulders and carries it back.  
 Then he calls friends and neighbors to come and celebrate  
 that he has found and restored the one that had gotten lost.

**God is like that shepherd rejoicing over the lost one who was found.**

2<sup>nd</sup> parable, Jesus tells about a women, who loses a precious coin,

so she lights a lamp and sweeps all through the house,  
seeking & searching for it until at last she has found it.  
Then she calls her friends and neighbors to come and celebrate  
that she has found and restored that precious missing coin.

**God's like the women who is so thrilled to find the one that was lost.**

Now in both of these parables it would not make any sense  
to speak of the lost sheep or coin as finding its way back.  
No, the celebration is about having **found that which was lost.**

It's a critical distinction, specifically about finding the lost,  
and not about the lost, with effort, managing to be found.

These first two parables set the theme & foundation for the next one,  
a much longer and more intricate parable,  
about our loving God who endlessly and relentlessly refuses  
to abandon the lost to the troubles and situations we create.

Jesus tells this parable of the prodigal son in answer & explanation  
to religious leaders who interpreted Jesus eating with sinners,  
as Jesus not taking the issue of sin seriously enough  
and that he wasn't concerned about the sin of the sinners.

Through the words and the actions of the younger son in the story,  
Jesus accurately portrays their own understanding of sin,  
that sin is selfish rebellion against the righteous rule & law of God,  
and that misusing God's gifts leads to terrible consequences.

This younger son exemplifies how they understood sin against God,  
"yes, that is how we see it, and that's why we reject sinners."  
The consequence of this young man's sin and rebellion  
is that he is alone, starving & reduced to feeding pigs.

As this son sees it, the problem was that he lost his father's money,  
but if he can earn it back, if he can repay it, then all will be well.  
His plan to confess, and to pay back for his offense  
was in perfect harmony with the Scribes & Pharisees' theology  
and exactly how they believed someone must deal with sin.

They see sin as something like a business transaction ---  
You must pay up for what has been lost,  
making sufficient retribution for your sin.

They saw mercy as God responding to human good works and effort,  
and that a sinner must somehow fulfill the requirements of God  
in order to be worthy of being forgiven and received by God.

In the parable, the young son returns home to the father,  
because he has failed, because he is hungry and starving,  
and not because of some admirable change of heart on his part.

But before the younger son can even reach the edge of the village,  
his father rushes out in an undignified run to embrace him,  
and he restores his son's status with ring and robe  
even before this son can confess his sin & repent.

The father, like the first two parables, the shepherd & the woman,  
is about preparations to celebrate, **his lost son has been found.**

To his critics, Jesus has explained his theology through a parable.  
He defined the seriousness of sin in way they would accept & agree,  
**but then he has redefined repentance in a radically new way.**

According to the parable,  
repentance is not making effort & sacrifice as repayment for sin,  
but rather **repentance is simply allowing yourself be found.**  
The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son  
none of them found or restored themselves on their own.

**Repentance is receiving the love, grace and pardon offered by God.  
which is why Jesus welcomes & eats with tax collectors and sinners.**

But Jesus isn't done,  
for now Jesus confronts those who complain about grace to sinners,  
those who object that he welcomes and eats with sinners.

His critics, the religious the hard working and obedient ones,  
are much like the elder son who has been working in the fields,  
who objects that his father has arranged to celebrate  
that his lost and wayward brother is back home again.

Just as the elder brother was resentful and angry  
and refused to join in and celebrate finding the lost,  
so too the religious leaders objected and grumbled  
against Jesus for celebrating sinners being found.

The elder son's perspective and attitude is just like that of Jonah.  
The city of Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire  
one of Israel's most brutal and bitter enemies,  
noted in the ancient world for immoral depravity.  
There was good reason to disapprove of the people of Nineveh.

When God commanded Jonah to warn Nineveh of his coming judgment,  
he disobeyed, got into a boat heading in the opposite direction,  
which lead to his 3 -day stay inside the belly of a large fish.

After three days, the fish spews Jonah out onto the shore,  
and he walks though Nineveh declaring God's imminent judgment.

Much to Jonah's chagrin, the whole city of Nineveh repented, vs. 10

*When God saw what they did, **how they turned from their evil ways**, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.*

Jonah was all set to enjoy & celebrate the destruction of Nineveh,  
and was incensed that God forgave the sinful and unworthy, 4:2, 4.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ... and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? ... for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing... And the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'

The elder son's angry perspective and attitude is like that of Jonah.  
So in his anger and resentment the son **publicly** refuses to go in.

In the Middle Eastern culture the elder son  
had an important and required social responsibility,  
to congratulate his father, to greet his guests and his brother.

To do any less was to publicly embarrass and humiliate his father,  
which no Middle Eastern patriarch would ever allow or accept.  
Yet this father, against all social and cultural standards,  
with compassion, he runs out and pleads with his son to come in.

Then to argue in public against his father was an offense which  
in that culture was even worse than his younger brother's,  
for the younger brother offended his father in private,  
but the elder son is humiliating his father in public...  
... the stunned village and guests must have been aghast.

In that expression of arrogance and prideful self-righteousness,  
this older son is speaking for the religious authorities,  
who object that Jesus offers God's mercy to unworthy sinners.

I recall leading a Bible study about this parable of the prodigal,  
and a Marine helicopter pilot in my class truly hated this parable.  
He was an honors graduate from the Annapolis Naval Academy,  
and was very hard-driven and highly motivated to succeed.

He was a most impressive and self-disciplined young officer,  
whose life was all about working hard to achieve and accomplish,  
and always trying to do the right and responsible thing.

Then he told about his brother, who was in constant trouble,  
a plague to their family, **enabled by his doting parents,**  
a costly and irresponsible embarrassment to them.

And even after countless rescues and second chances,  
still a self-indulgent failure and near-do-well at best.

He was not very impressed by the prodigal son's pardoning father,  
**having observed that 'homecoming' experience too many times.**

And the truth is, such grace can be very offensive  
to our sense of justice and personal responsibility.  
It violates and upsets our whole sense of right and wrong  
when fairness is **supplanted by extravagant love & grace.**

That Marine was certain and convinced that Luke had heard it wrong,  
or else that part of the parable had been translated incorrectly.  
But these parables in Luke, are not intended to be taken  
as God's instructions for raising responsible children.

We're not God, and obviously in the parable of the prodigal,  
the elder brother represents those religious leaders,  
who object when Jesus reaches out to the sinners & outcasts,  
to those they considered **hopelessly lost and unworthy.**

From the Jewish perspective,  
if a sinner repented and turned aside from their former ways,  
then God would graciously accept their effort & sacrifice.

**But Jesus lived out and described**  
**a far more radical searching-seeking of the lost sort-of-love,**  
**in which God himself makes the first move toward the lost sinner.**

In this parable both sons were lost, rebelled against the father,  
and both lacked an appropriate relationship with their father,  
**one to worldly recklessness - the other to angry self-righteousness.**

The younger son represents **those on the outside** with no church connection.  
The elder son describes **those on the inside**,  
religious & active in the Church, but also harsh & judgmental.

That elder son is the part of us,  
that doesn't like it when someone else gets more than they deserve,  
when someone we perceive as unworthy, is loved, nevertheless.

But notice that despite his son's frozen resentment and bitterness,  
yet the father still tries to deal with him graciously,  
even coming out to him amid his very public misbehavior,  
still inviting him in to celebrate finding the lost...  
... the father continues to seek reconciliation with his son.

**In this parable, Jesus reveals two shocking truths:**

- 1<sup>st</sup>, that the younger son is loved and welcomed back,
- 2<sup>nd</sup>, that the dutiful and hardworking elder brother  
is not loved more than the other for being faithful.

Sometimes we forget that grace is entirely God's gift and mercy,  
it's all God's love, always unearned and entirely undeserved.

Did you notice that the parable ends before it is finished,  
and we are not told whether or not the elder son ever comes in?  
It's up to us to complete the story by how we choose to respond.  
by how we respond to God's grace toward the unworthy,  
by our willingness to celebrate God's joy and delight  
when those who are wrong, different or difficult  
are called by God into loving reconciliation.

It is important to see, that the father reaches out to the elder son,  
not because he has worked so hard and has fulfilled his duty,  
but because the father so chooses ---  
because it is the Father's nature & will to love, heal and forgive,  
for our God's gracious love seeks out his lost sons & daughters.

So will I as the sheep, the coin & the younger son let myself be found,  
and will I as the elder son come into the Father's joy & celebration?

When I am lost in my good works, caught in frozen resentment & anger,  
when I am stuck & imprisoned in harsh obedience or driven by duty,  
will I let God's gracious love and transforming power find me?

During the season of Lent our focus is on repentance,  
which according to Luke 15 is receiving God's gracious love,  
and responding by serving as **extenders of that joy and grace.**

Romans 15:7 & 13

Welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.  
(and) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power  
of the Holy Spirit.