

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **The Parable of the Lost Son – Part 1**

*Luke 15:11-16*

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# The Parable of the Lost Son – Part 1

## Scripture

We are studying chapter 15 in *The Gospel of Luke*. It is a marvelous chapter as Jesus explained the good news of salvation in the parable of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. William Barclay says, “There is no chapter of the New Testament so well known and so dearly loved as the fifteenth chapter of Luke’s gospel. It has been called ‘the gospel in the gospel,’ as if it contained the very distilled essence of the good news which Jesus came to tell.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus preached the good news of salvation to all people. In Luke 15 Jesus implied that there are basically two kinds of people in this world: religious people and irreligious people. Religious people believe that God will accept them because of their good works; they are law-keepers. Irreligious people generally have no interest in God and the things of God; they are law-breakers.

Astonishingly, Jesus’ message about the kingdom of God and how to enter it resonated not with the religious people of his day but rather with the irreligious people. The religious people – the Pharisees and the scribes – were furious with Jesus that he would not only teach irreligious people about the way of salvation but that he would even *eat* with them. The attitude of the religious toward the irreligious was summed up in a later rabbinic saying, “Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him to the Law.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus taught that, in the words of D. A. Carson, “God rejoices over the recovery of a lost sinner, and therefore it is Je-

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 236.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1005.

sus' supreme desire to seek and save the lost (19:10)."<sup>3</sup> The parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son in Luke 15 is the most beautiful illustration in all of Scripture about God's joy over the recovery of lost sinners. Each time the lost object is found, there is a call to celebrate its recovery. And as Carson notes, "In just the same way, it is implied, the Pharisees should share in God's rejoicing over the salvation of the outcasts."<sup>4</sup>

But, sadly, the Pharisees and the scribes – the religious people – do not rejoice over the salvation of the outcasts – the irreligious people. This three-part parable in Luke 15 is directed to religious people. We have already examined the part of the parable dealing with the lost sheep and the lost coin. Today, we will examine the third part of the parable, the lost son.

The third part of the parable is usually called "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." John MacArthur says, "Charles Dickens (who could spin a fair yarn himself) famously called the parable of the prodigal son the greatest short story ever written."<sup>5</sup> The more I study the parable, the more amazed I am at its brilliance and beauty. However, the parable is really not about a "prodigal son." It is about a gracious father and two sons. But, I will have no success in changing centuries of tradition!

I plan to divide the parable of the lost son into three parts. We shall examine the younger son, the father, and the older son in three successive sermons.

Let's read the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32. For the sake of context, I shall read verses 1-3, and our text for today is Luke 15:11-16:

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled,

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed., 1005.

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed., 1005.

<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *A Tale of Two Sons: The inside Story of a Father, His Sons, and a Shocking Murder* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), n.p.

saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: . . . <sup>11</sup> **And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.**

<sup>17</sup> "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." ' <sup>20</sup> And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup> but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat,

that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup> And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’ ” (Luke 15:11-16)

## Introduction

John MacArthur writes, “Sin never delivers what it promises, and the pleasurable life sinners think they are pursuing always turns out to be precisely the opposite: a hard road that inevitably leads to ruin and the ultimate, literal dead end.”<sup>6</sup>

This truth was dramatically illustrated in the life of the younger son in the parable of the lost son.

## Lesson

The parable of the lost younger son in Luke 15:11-16 teaches us about the consequences of sin.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Younger Son’s Demand (15:11-12)
2. The Younger Son’s Departure (15:13a)
3. The Younger Son’s Decline (15:13b)
4. The Younger Son’s Destitution (15:14-16)

### I. The Younger Son’s Demand (15:11-12)

First, let’s look at the younger son’s demand.

Jesus **said** in verse 11, **“There was a man who had two sons.”**

There are three characters in this story. Each one plays a major role in the story, and we should not neglect any of them.

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<sup>6</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *A Tale of Two Sons*, n.p.

There is a father, an older son, and a younger son. The climax of the entire parable is at the end, where the father pleads with the older son to join the party. So, the older son's involvement needs careful examination from the beginning.

Jesus continued in verse 12a, **“And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ ”** We would consider it unusual for a son to request his share of the inheritance before his father had died. However, in Middle Eastern culture in Jesus' day, that was unthinkable.

Kenneth E. Bailey is a Presbyterian scholar who lived and taught for more than 60 years in the Middle East. He has studied this parable extensively. Here is what he said about the younger son's request:

Again and again I have engaged in some form of the following conversation:

“Has anyone ever made such a request in your village?”

“Never!”

“Could anyone ever make such a request?”

“Impossible!”

“If anyone ever did, what would happen?”

“His father would become very angry and refuse!”

“Why?”

“This request means *he wants his father to die!*”<sup>7</sup>

The division of the father's wealth normally came at the end of his life. There were legal procedures available if the father chose to divide his property among his sons as he approached the end of his life. If the father did divide his property before his death, the heirs were given the legal right of *possession*, but not the right of *disposition*. That is, the sons had a legal right to the property, but they could not sell it.

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*, Second Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005), 41.

The younger son's request shows that he wishes that his father were dead. He does not want to have a relationship with his father and he wanted to live his life without interference from his father. "Theologically," says Bailey, "Jesus is affirming that humankind in their rebellion against God really want him dead!"<sup>8</sup>

Deuteronomy 21:17 states that the firstborn receives a double portion of the inheritance. So, if there are two sons, the older son receives two-thirds and the younger son one-third of the inheritance. The law did not specifically state that the son must wait until the death of his father to receive the inheritance. In Jesus' parable the younger son has not broken the law. Rather, he has broken his father's heart. The younger son has broken the relationship and not the law.

In Jesus' day, the request for an inheritance prior to the death of the father would have resulted in the father striking the son across his face and immediately driving him out of the house. It was utterly disgraceful for the younger son to make such an impudent request of his father, and it was fully expected that the father would hit his son and send him away.

So, imagine the surprise of the religious people when Jesus said in verse 12b that the father **divided his property between** the two sons. This is the first of five instances in the parable of the lost son that the father does not act in accordance with traditional Middle Eastern practice. From the rest of the story we gather that the father was wealthy (since he had servants and could afford a fattened calf). Giving the younger son his inheritance meant that he would have to sell one-third of his estate. This would have publically humiliated the father, but he was willing to do that because he loved his sons.

When we rebel against God, we demand that he give us everything we can get. In astonishing love, God allows us to rebel against him. "William Temple has somewhere said that *God*

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, 42.

*grants us freedom, even to reject his love.*"<sup>9</sup> God gives us the freedom to chart our own course. He grants us manifold gifts that we use for our own selfish purposes.

## II. The Younger Son's Departure (15:13a)

Second, observe the younger son's departure.

Jesus said in verse 13, "**Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country.**"

The **far country** would have been Gentile territory. In Jesus' day the Jews had a method for punishing any Jewish son who lost his family inheritance to Gentiles. The villages of the Middle East had a ceremony called the *kezazah* ceremony (the cutting off ceremony). Bailey describes the ceremony:

The ceremony itself was simple. Fellow villagers would fill a large earthenware pot with burned nuts and burned corn and break it in front of the guilty individual. While doing this, they would shout, "So-and-so is cut off from his people." From that point on, the village would have nothing to do with the hapless lad.<sup>10</sup>

So, as the younger son left the village and his father and older brother, he was very aware that if he lost any money, the entire village would cut him off forever.

But, he was on top of the world! He was confident that he would succeed. But, later, when he lost everything, the *kezazah* ceremony would have been in the forefront of his mind and discouraged him from returning to the village and his home.

Also, I want you to notice that the older son does not feature in this part of the parable. Certainly, in a small village like

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 102.



theirs, he (and everybody else) knew what the younger son had asked of his father. In this matter between his father and his younger brother, the older brother refused to be the mediator. Bailey says, "In the villages when I come to this point in a sermon on this text, I always ask, 'Who must be the reconciler?' The villagers always answer from their pews, 'His brother, of course.' Everybody knows this."<sup>11</sup> The mediator was to be the person with the strongest relationship to both parties. He was to work with each party and help them come to an agreeable solution.

But the older son never did this. This is the first indication in the story that his relationship with his father was also broken. It may be that his relationship with his brother was broken too. There was no love between the older son and his father and brother.

Surely, we who know our heavenly father should do all we can to facilitate reconciliation between him and our lost brothers and sisters.

### III. The Younger Son's Decline (15:13b)

Third, notice the younger son's decline.

After the younger son left and went to the far country, Jesus simply said about him in verse 13b, ". . . **and there he squandered his property in reckless living.**" It is important to note that Jesus did not specify exactly what the younger son did. He simply **squandered his property in reckless living.** The usual interpretation, based on the older son's accusation of prostitutes in verse 30, is that the younger son lived an immoral sexual life. Well, that may have happened. But the text actually does not say that he did so.

When people are rebelling against God, they are certainly squandering his gifts to them. But, let us be careful not to at-

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, 45.

tribute sins to them that they may not have committed.

#### IV. The Younger Son's Destitution (15:14-16)

And finally, notice the younger son's destitution.

Jesus continued in verse 14, **"And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need."** So, first, the younger son **spent everything**. His lifestyle led him down the path to poverty. Then, second, God also intervened, as he so often does. A **severe famine arose in that country**. God turned up the heat on the younger son to get him to see the misery of his rebellion. And, of course, **he began to be in need**.

At this point, he should have stopped and realized that he was a rebel against his father. He should have repented and gone back to his father. But he did not. One thing that most likely weighed on his mind was the *kezazah* ceremony that awaited him if he returned.

Instead, Jesus said in verse 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."** The Greek word for **hired** (*ekollethe*) means "to glue, to stick, or to cleave."<sup>12</sup> The idea is that the younger son found someone – perhaps one of his friends with whom he had squandered his money – and attached himself to him. The younger son desperately needed work. But the friend wanted to get rid of the younger son. So, he gave him a job that he thought would get rid of the younger son. Surely, **to feed pigs** would get rid of the younger son.

Now, you may recall that pigs were unclean for Jews. That was the lowest job a Jew could do. But, the younger son was desperate. He took the job. It was not too long, Jesus said in verse 16, that the younger son **"was longing to be fed with**

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<sup>12</sup> James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 43.

**the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.”**

Eventually, the younger son starved. All his friends deserted him. **No one gave him anything.**

The younger son was like so many lottery winners. He had a large amount of cash. Everyone was his friend. But, quicker than he thought, the money ran out, and so did his friends.

Sin is like that. Satan lures us into doing things that seem satisfying and fulfilling at first. But, eventually, they no longer satisfy. And we are left alone in our misery.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed the lost younger son in Luke 15:11-16, we should receive God’s grace and repent of our sin.

The sin of the younger son was that of a law-breaker. He rejected his father’s love and care and support and provision. He did not want to submit to his father.

People do that with God today too, don’t they? They don’t want to submit to his law. They reject his love and care and support and provision not realizing that “sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:15).

If there is anyone here today who is running from God, I urge you to stop running. God is a gracious God. He is a merciful God. He welcomes home all sinners who turn to him for forgiveness. There is no one who is beyond the grace and mercy and forgiveness of God. So, turn to God today and receive his grace and mercy and forgiveness. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
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**PRAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for the parable of Jesus in Luke 15 about the lost younger son. He rebelled against the love of his father and found himself in a sinful mess.

If there is anyone here today who is still lost, will you grant that person faith and repentance? Will you save that lost person?

And will you enable all of us who are no longer lost to tell others about Jesus and the salvation that can be found only in him. And may we rejoice with all heaven at the salvation of every lost person.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!