

The Lost Sons

This morning we are going to read, possibly **one of the most famous stories Jesus told**. Whether you believe or don't believe in Jesus you have probably heard this story.

Although it is commonly titled "the parable of the prodigal son" **it is not just about one son, there are 3 main characters in this story**, but there are **4 different sets of people involved in the telling of this story**.

3 of the 4 are actually in the story and the 4th is the one telling the story.

We have **God the father**, who is the father in the story, we have the **youngest son** who represents the sinners and tax collectors, we have the **older son** who represents the Pharisees and finally we have **Jesus**, the 3rd son.

A few weeks ago when we looked at why Jesus taught in parables we realised the best way to look at parables was to ask the question; **"which character am I?"** we can then **receive transformation rather than just information**.

As we look at this story today, let's ask ourselves that question again.

So here we go. The story of the lost sons...

Luke 15

¹Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

¹¹Jesus said: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³"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. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He 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 men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against

heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰So 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.'

²²"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. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So 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. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰But 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. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

Last week we looked at the parables of the lost coin and the lost Sheep, Andy, Helen and Sophia **reminded us just how much God loves us, and that it is he who comes looking for those who are lost.** This parable continues on the **themes of God's love and Grace towards lost people**, but makes it much more personal. It becomes clear who we are in the story.

So let's look at the **4 characters in this story** and what we can learn from them.

Let's kick off with the **2 sons in the story**, and to do this I want to make a comparison between them. Now as I said we can ask ourselves which character are we... well we are not God or Jesus, so **we will tend toward one of the sons in the story.**

Son 1 – The younger son

Materialistic

Rebellious

Innovation –

New lifestyle

New sexuality

New Culture

Non conformity

Break the rules

Liberal

Immoral

Disobedient

Lazy

Use people

Unrighteous

Son 2 – The older son

Moralistic

Religious

Tradition –

Always done this way

Keep customs and traditions

Look at the “good old days”

Conformity – play by the rules

Keep the rules

Conservative

Moral

Obedient

Hard working

Judge people

Self-righteous

The thing is **both the sons are users....** They **use their father for their own gain.** The younger son used his father for **self-gratification and sin**, the older son used his father for **self-worth and to build his CV.**

Which one of these do you relate to?

Which one do you think I tend towards? **To be honest I'd probably say I tend toward religion rather than rebellion.** I was mostly compliant growing up, I would want to please those around me, even when I may rebel it's only rebellion to those more religious than me. Lol

We will all tend towards one of these characters. It was the same when Jesus told the story! **He knew his audience, the sinners and tax collectors and the Pharisees. This is still relevant today.**

So Jesus is prompting you where do you sit.. **the truth is both sons are lost.** We may believe in God, like the Pharisees, **but are still lost in a way because of our religious attitudes and spirit.**

So what about the father in the story? I have already said he represents God the father. How he responds to both sons is amazing and something we can learn from. Now I said we are not God, but **we can be like him in our interactions with other people.**

So what are the main characteristics he exhibits?

LOVING – COMPASSIONATE – SELFLESS – GRACIOUS – KIND – FORGIVING

LOVING -It is all about love. God is love, **Jesus came because of love. Jn 3:16.** Not just a gooey emotion, but a sacrificial action. That's what love is!

COMPASSIONATE – The father is cut to the heart when he sees his son returning to him. He is also cut to the heart when he has to plead with the older son to return to the party. **Compassion is one of the most amazing characteristics of God**, it flows from his love for us, but it compels him to action. This is to be a characteristic of Christians especially in this world.

SELFLESS – The actions of the father show he is not too proud to worry about his own actions. **He puts others above himself.** The father in the story pulls his clothes up around his knees and runs. Absolutely not the don't thing for a man of his age and standing! God became a man he humbled himself and Jesus died on the cross in the most selfless act. **Are we selfless? Or are we selfish, just like both brothers in the story?** As Christians, the world needs to see selflessness in us!

GRACIOUS – to be honest, neither son deserves the love that the father shows them. The younger one basically said to him when asking for the money, you're as good as dead to me. And the older son was so caught up in his rights he was just horrible to his father and his wishes. **Grace is when God shows his love to us when we don't deserve it. It is truly amazing!**

KIND – how kind the father is to the sons, he loves them and wants the best for them. God is Kind towards us. **In Romans it says it is God's Kindness that leads us to repentance**, or to turn away from our selfish ways to follow him.

FORGIVING – What a powerful gift he offers to his son. **I forgive you! Forgiveness is so powerful!** It disarms the power of Satan, who wants us to be bound up in bitterness towards other people.

These characteristics are truly amazing, and actually outrageous! God's love, grace, compassion, selflessness, kindness and forgiveness are all outrageous and outstanding!

These show who God is?

So whether we already believe in Jesus or not we need to respond to this story, and the only way to respond, **the only way to know God the father is through the 3rd son, the son telling the story, the one who gave everything so we may know the father.... JESUS.**

Jesus is not like the rebellious Son, **he never sinned**, he's not the religious son, **he is the son of God.**

He has come for everyone.. **everybody is somebody to Jesus!** He comes for the **rebellious and the religious.** We know that the religious people were actually put him to death and he is going to die for their sin and the sin of the rebellious.

JESUS CHRIST IS GOD, become man. He is the ULTIMATE big brother!!

In Luke 9:51 It says: "he set his face towards Jerusalem."

Jesus, our big brother, the one who goes out looking for us **is on a mission**, to get to Jerusalem, **to die on a cross in our place for our sins, to pay a debt, and he rises to give us new life!!**

We all **start out like either the rebellious or religious brother**, but the amazing thing, because of Jesus **we can be like the 3rd son**.

**Jesus Christ is how the father runs to us,
he's how the father embraces us,
he's how the father kisses us,
he's how the father blesses us,
he's how the father adopts us into his family.
It's Jesus that clothes us with his robe of righteousness.**

This is called the **great exchange**. 2 cor 5:21 God made him who knew no sin to become sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So there is a 3rd way to live, **neither the rebellious way or the religious way, but the way of Grace.**

Will you put to death your religious legalistic ways? Will you put to death your rebellious ways and live in the righteousness of Jesus by his Grace!

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

So now **just like the rebellious son who stands before the father empty handed and shoeless, and he's given this grace, we receive this gracious gift of the righteousness, the perfect Spirit-filled life of obedience of Jesus Christ**. The result is **we get to live a new life because the Son of God takes away our sin, gives us his righteousness, to live a life that is holy but is humble and is helpful toward others** and has a **heart of compassion like the father** and runs to those who are repentant like the father did and embraces and kisses and welcomes and graces them and is generous toward them to extend the love of the Father that's been given to us. My hope, my prayer is that you would run home to the Father, those of you who are rebellious and those of us who are religious.

GRACE IS UNDESERVED, AND GOD LAVISHES IT ON HIS CHILDREN.

How **amazing it is to be loved by God like this!** And when we know how much we are loved we love him, and we love one another and value each other and even lay down our lives for each other. He charges us to love one another in the same way he loves us, which is the same way he is loved by his Father.

God says, come as you are and I will do the rest!

Friends, come as you are, repent of your rebellion of religiosity, and let the grace of God overwhelm you.