
The Context of the Luke 15 Parables

- Beginning in Luke 9:22, Jesus is being rejected by the nation’s leaders as the Messiah.
- Jesus is **journeying toward Jerusalem** (Lk 13:22), and teaching while he does so. Part of the teaching had been the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Lk. 13:18-21).
- Following these parables (which we considered in session 4), Jesus talks to the people about entrance into the Kingdom:
 - Jesus teaches entrance into the Kingdom (Lk. 13:23-24). Note that He is *not* teaching how to be saved, since Kingdom entrance and salvation are *not* the same thing.
 - Jesus teaches *why* many **will not be able** (Lk. 13:24) to enter the Kingdom in vv. 25-28.
 - Jesus teaches that *many* will come into the Kingdom, **from the east and from the west** (v. 29).
 - Jesus teaches *why* these will come – v. 30. This is a somewhat mystical statement that does not have full meaning at this time but refers to the *last generation* of Israel which will be the *first generation* to experience the Kingdom. This last generation will come from east, west, north, and south.
- On the journey, Jesus **went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees** (Lk. 14:1). Here he healed a man on the Sabbath, but the Pharisees **held their peace** (v. 4). Jesus then began giving “illustrations” and parables. These included:
 - The illustration of the ox in the ditch – v. 5-6
 - The parable of the wedding feast – vv. 7-11.
 - The illustration of a dinner for friends – vv. 12-14
 - The parable of the great supper – vv. 15-24
- After dinner with the Pharisee, Jesus left and **there went great multitudes with Him** (Lk 14:25) and in verses 26-35 explains the true cost of receiving the Kingdom. Note again that Paul’s gospel of “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” is not found in these verses. What is found is Jesus’ gospel of “forsake everything” or be “cast out.” When one fails to *rightly divide* they will create a “forsake everything” gospel that is at odds with *by grace through faith*.

Luke 15:1-32 | The Lost Parables

- Verses 1-2 –
 - These parables were given to the **Pharisees and scribes** (v. 2) because Jesus was talking to **the publicans and sinners** (v. 1).
 - For an accurate interpretation of these parables, it is essential that we take the parables in the context, remembering that they are related to the rejection of the King and directed toward the spiritual leadership of the nation.
- Verses 3-5 – The Parable of the Lost Sheep
 - One of the keys to this parable, I believe, is the introduction, **what man of you**. He is directing this to the religious leadership. The Hebrew prophets were filled with condemnation toward the religious leaders, referring to them as shepherds. Compare, for example, Ezekiel 34:2-5, Jeremiah 2:8, Zechariah 11, etc.

- In contrast, among these self-serving shepherds was the Good Shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep.
- The Good Shepherd would **go after that which is lost, until he find it**. This shows the longsuffering and patience of our Lord.
- The message was one of repentance because it was concerning the Kingdom. The **just persons** were the Pharisees, who had justified themselves, see Luke 16:15 and Luke 18:9.
- Verses 8-10 – The Parable of the 10 pieces of silver
 - The parable likely reminds the Pharisees of the value of searching for lostness rather than sitting in self-righteousness.
 - Furthermore, the entirety of the Jewish nation (both the 10 tribes of Israel and the 2 tribes of Judah) is too valuable to lose any. Jesus said **of all which he [the Father] hath given me I should lose nothing** (Jn. 6:39).

Luke 15:11-32 | The Lost Son

- It is questionable whether this story is a parable or an actual event with *typological* application. We will address it in this parable study, but will treat it as a *type* rather than a *parable*.
- The story has some degree of apparent historicity to it, and various interpretations through history have treated it as a “time and space” event.
- The danger of this parable is to apply to *us* what the Lord told to *the Pharisees*.
 - The New American Commentary says, “The church must continually examine the significance of this parable. Will we be the church of the elder brother or the church of the loving father?”¹
 - Since this parable is not about the church, the church is neither the elder brother nor the loving father.
 - Too many have butchered this parable by making the younger son the “repentant Christian” and the older brother the Jewish people.
- The story is about a **certain man** who almost undoubtedly represents God the Father, and **two sons**. These were both sons, which immediately leads us to consider Israel, which, in Deuteronomy 14:1 is called **children of the Lord your God**.
- Verses 2-24 –
 - The younger son must represent Israel, the son that took his inheritance and fled. Judah, however, represented in the Pharisees, was prideful in having never left their post.
 - The typology is largely accurate to Israel’s history, with the exception being that the 10 tribes were scattered into a **far country** rather than having chosen to go live there. While there, Israel often **would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat** (v. 16). After the holocaust, Israel determined to go home, and (it appears) the Father is rejoicing that **he was lost, and is found** (v. 24). This rejoicing is seen in the protection and prosperity that the sons of Israel have experienced since their return.
- Verses 25-32 –
 - These verses speak of the older son, which doubtless was represented in the Pharisees, who had (on the surface) remained faithfully at the Father’s side.
 - The condemnation in this story goes completely to the elder son, and yet the condemnation is also filled with a compassionate father (fitting with the context of Luke 13:34).

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 410.