



BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW

Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010

May 9, 2010

The Prodigal Son: Luke 15

Getting Started

Lost—a lamb, a coin, a son! Luke 15 contains a trilogy from Jesus' mouth, stories about losing, finding, and joy. In each story, there is joy among those who find what they are looking for. In the third story, the stakes are high. Jesus is describing a lost human. This final story contrasts two very different reactions to finding that lost son: the joy of the father who found a once-lost son and the faithful, yet joyless, older brother. These stories are Jesus' response to criticism from "good folks" about his association with "bad folks."

The Story

Jesus tells of a father and his two sons. The younger son asks his father to give him an early inheritance. The father grants the request and the younger son leaves home for a distant land where he wastes his money on wild living. The money is quickly exhausted and a famine strikes. Now homeless, penniless, and hungry, the younger son finds lowly work feeding pigs, and is so hungry he finds the pigs' food attractive.

His time with the pigs brings him to his senses and a decision—to return home to his father. He decides to return not as a son, but as a hired servant. His planned speech to his father has a request to "make me like one of your hired servants" (19b). His attitude of "give me" before he left home has been transformed to an attitude of "make me" (12, 19).

As the younger son approaches home, his father sees him and runs to him, filled with love and compassion. He embraces his son and kisses him. There is great joy. The son tries to recite his rehearsed speech but the father will not let him finish. This is no time for speeches. It is time for a party! The lost son has come home.

The father sends his servants to prepare a feast and cook the fatted calf. He also commands them to bring his son a fine robe, a ring, and sandals. The party soon begins; yet, someone is absent. The boy's older brother, hard at work in the fields, has not yet arrived.

With the celebration well underway, the older son returns home from work and asks his father about the celebration. The father shares the good news and his joy—your once-lost brother has returned! Rather than share in the joy, the older brother is critical and angry. Showing little concern, the older son describes his repentant brother as "this son of yours who wasted your money on prostitutes." In love, the father responds that all he has still belongs to the older son. He continues, "We had to celebrate this happy day for your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found" (15:32). Driven by the father's party for the

younger son, the older brother derives his anger from a belief that his years of obedience are now for naught. Jesus ends the story here, allowing us to ponder what happens next.

What the story tells us about God?

Perhaps God allows us to wonder what happens next so we can learn from these three characters—a loving father, a wayward child, and a faithful child. The father in this story is God. The sons are God's children—one wayward and one faithful. God allows his children to make choices, even bad choices. He also allows His children to suffer the consequences of bad decisions. God waits for his wayward children to repent and return. When wayward children return, He will not only run and welcome them, but he will also embrace them, kiss them, and show His love and joy. God will celebrate! He loves the lost. God is joyful when the lost return. God also loves His faithful and loyal children, but is no doubt frustrated when they are unwilling to share in the joy of their once-lost siblings who have repented and returned. God reminds His faithful children of their current inheritance ("all I have is yours") and urges them to be joyful when the lost come home.

Now, what about our faith?

Which son are you? Are we not all a combination—a little of both? God loves both His wayward children and His faithful children. Whether you are wayward or faithful, God insists on joy in repentance. He waits for us longingly. God is our loving father.

Monday: Read Luke 15:1-7

1. Why does Jesus begin this trilogy of stories about being lost?
2. Why do sheep become lost and why is there joy when they are found?

Tuesday: Read Luke 15:8-10

1. What is the significance of the woman's searching for her one lost coin?
2. Why does she invite her friend and neighbors to celebrate her joy in finding the coin?

Wednesday: Read Luke 15:11-32

1. Jesus progresses from a sheep, to coinage, to a human. Why?
2. Why would the son ask for an early inheritance?
3. Why would his father agree to such a request?

Thursday: Re-Read Luke 15 (the whole chapter)

1. Does it matter what the younger son did while in a foreign land and if so, why and for who does it matter?
2. What brought the boy to his senses? Why does he feel servanthood is better than sonship?
3. Why is the father waiting and why does he react in the manner we read about in Luke 15?

Friday: Read Romans 5:1-11

1. Which son are you and why?
2. If you are a "younger son," how do you respond to our father's joy and love?
3. If you are an "older son," what stands in the way of being joyful over the return of a lost sibling?
4. Make a list of lost siblings; then make a list of those who have returned. Pray to God in joy over those who have returned. Pray for the return of those who have yet to repent.