

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 24, Parables on the Lost and Celebration, Luke 15

© 2024 Dan Darko and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Daniel K. Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 24, Parables of the Lost and Celebration, Luke 15.

Welcome back to the Biblical e-learning lecture series.

In the previous lecture, we saw Jesus at mealtime in the house of the ruler of the Pharisees. There a few things in Jesus addressed the issue of honor going to a place and trying to sit at the lower seat so that you can be honored or elevated to a higher standing, and then we also saw how Jesus will talk about a parable of the banquet before he would challenge them about the cost of discipleship. If you recall very well in a discussion with the Pharisees and the lawyers, he mentioned that it is important to consider inviting the crippled, the lame, the blind, and the poor to the dinner table, and then in the parable of the banquet, he emphasized that and then he knew that they were very uncomfortable about that he goes on to lay out a cost of discipleship, a cost that may involve social relations with people and attitude towards material possessions. Here in Luke 15, we see Jesus doing something else, beginning with mealtime.

At this point, his critics are going to question him on why he should dine with the people he doesn't they don't think he should dine with. We have come to know these parables as parables of the lost, and the most popular one some of you have referred to as the parable of the prodigal son. I would try to convince you that perhaps we should call it something differently, but these three parables that are in Luke 15 are all put in a very organized manner in a very literally well-crafted way to make a very important case that Jesus wants to make to his critics.

From verses 1 to 7, we'll see the parable of the lost sheep, and Jesus will go on to tell the parable of the lost coin, and then he will go on to talk about the parable of the lost sons. What is the framework of this parable? Let me give you four quick things before we proceed to look at the text a little bit more closely. First, you look at the cause of all three parables and deal with loss, recovery, and celebration.

Second, you look at the arrangement. We will observe the pattern and the climatic effect of how Jesus will use this pattern of hundred ten and two. He starts with a higher number, he goes with ten, and then he goes with two, and then he creates his punch line, a big punch line there. Three notice grumbling as we go on to look at the longest chapter as it relates to the first two verses of Luke 15. You will see the Pharisees grumbling in chapter 15, verses 1 and 2, and then by the time we reach chapter 15, verses 29 to 30, we will see the elder brother of a lost brother grumbling.

The other thing you may want to observe in this discourse is how joy and celebration go on to almost diffuse and also to provide a rationale for the wish grumbling should not be in the scene. Central to all these questions for the grumbling is why Jesus should feast with sinners and tax collectors. I will also walk you through and remind you that Luke is quick to show us these parables not only for the central message but also for using the characters in the parables to convey a strong message to us.

He will use shepherds, he will use a woman, and he will use a son that people like the Pharisees and the scribes would not like to hear, but could have provenance in the presence of a rabbi like Jesus. So let's turn to Luke 15, verse 1, and read now from verses 1 to 6. Now, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him, and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying this man receives sinners and eats with them. Note that in verse 2 line, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

That provokes Jesus to continue this three series of parables with verse 3. So he told them this parable: what a man of you having a hundred sheep if he has lost one of them does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it and when he has found it he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing and when he comes home he calls together his friends and is never saying to them rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost. Note the punch line in verse 7. Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. The question Jesus seeks to answer in this parable should not be forgotten in the background, and the question is, this man receives sinners and eats with them. Why should he do that? It is a question coming from the Pharisees and the scribes.

In this parable of the lost sheep, please note that Jesus uses a shepherd. A shepherd is supposed to be despised a shepherd is one society will not respect that much, but Jesus will elevate the status of a shepherd in this parable to show that in the kingdom of God, the occupations that are not well received or well honored in society will still take some prominence or be received in the kingdom so shepherd becomes a key figure here and then let's go on with what happens with the shepherd. The shepherd loses one sheep and says to himself I need to go and look for that sheep that was lost.

What Jesus is doing here is noteworthy. He's using a shepherd, a despised occupation, as an example for the Pharisees and the scribes to learn what is important in the kingdom of God. He said the shepherd lost one sheep, and he left the 99 to go and look for the one that was missing. Now, let me clarify a few things here.

There are those who are of the view that perhaps the shepherd left the 99 caring less about what happens to them. No, that is not what is going on here. In the ancient Middle Eastern culture, shepherds go in groups.

The father may go with his sons, and they will take care of the flock. The fact that the main shepherd himself will go and look for the one that is missing is a central issue here. It's not leaving the 99 in disregard of their fate.

No, the 99 will be taken care of by other shepherds, perhaps children of the shepherd, but the fact that the shepherd will set aside the time and think that that one sheep that is lost deserves his attention, his effort to go and look for is the issue, Jesus is arriving at here. When the shepherd finds the sheep, we are told he takes that sheep and puts it on his shoulder. What a triumphant scene in which the shepherd counts this sheep so important and so precious that he finds the sheep, takes the sheep, and puts it on his shoulder.

You know, we learn quite a few things about this culture, for we are told, as Snodgrass writes in his book on the parables, that a lost sheep usually lies down and gives up and will not find its way back. That is to say that in this parable, the audience of Jesus' knowledge they are fully aware that when a sheep gets lost, the sheep lies down in wait to be found, but this foolish animal is still so important to the shepherd that a shepherd would do this and when the shepherd finds it the shepherd is not upset the shepherd finds a cause for celebration. So, the question is, why do you spend time dining with sinners and tax collectors? Oh, in effect, Jesus is saying, like that lost sheep when the sheep was found, why should we not call friends and relatives to celebrate that this sheep which was lost is now found? Why should we not celebrate the fact that the sinners and the tax collectors have been found, and it is worth dining with them? Remember, in the previous chapter, he gave them the parable of the banquet.

They should understand that in the kingdom of God is a place where the ordinaries can find their place, and if it's an issue of whether the tax collectors and the sinners can find their place dining with him and the Pharisees and the scribes can have problems with this they should consider the spirit of the shepherd when he found that lost sheep. Oh, there is a cause to rejoice, but what would the Pharisees and the scribes do? Why are they not happy to rejoice with them? Jesus goes on to tell another parable. In this parable, he turns to another figure, another figure that Pharisees should not be happy to know about.

He uses a woman as the main character in the parable. If you recall, in Luke's narrative, Luke uses a Samaritan to press home at a point in chapter 10 on the parable of the good Samaritan. Here we see Jesus getting to the Pharisees again by first using a shepherd and then now a woman, and I read.

Oh, or what woman having 10 silver coins if she loses one coin does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it and when she's found she has found it she calls together her friends and neighbors saying rejoice with me for I have found the coin that I have lost. Note the punch line in verse 10. So that I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Here, Jesus reveals a clue. He uses the woman, presumably a woman who has lost some of her dowry, who persistently searches to find and calls around to celebrate, but notice the line in the punch line here how Jesus puts it. So that I tell you he says there is joy before the angel of God over one sinner who repents.

Notice that word who repents. Why do you dine with sinners and tax collectors? Oh, Jesus is suggesting that perhaps the people they are looking at as sinners may have already been repented. There may have already been people in the kingdom of God.

They may have embraced the kingdom of God for what the kingdom brings, but they still project old images onto them. Just so there is a cause to rejoice before the angels. Why are you dining? We are celebrating because the lost is found.

Wow, Jesus knows how to get the Pharisees on issues like this. Using a woman as the central figure should be an issue. Touching on possession and looking for possession is very interesting.

Show something that is significant to the woman's place in the household—such a required real effort and a sense of the value of that which is lost. Jesus said there is every cause for us to rejoice and celebrate.

That is why you see him or me in the looking putting myself in the place of Jesus with tax collectors and sinners, and then Jesus will go on to tell the parable that is very, very popular. Some of you know it as the parable of the prodigal son. Before I proceed, let me try to persuade you here.

As we read through the parable, please understand this. Understand that you will not see the tone and the tenure of a disappointed father who thinks he has a son who is wasteful. To say he's a prodigal son is to slap the badge on him as a wasteful vagabond who's supposed to be identified as such.

That defeats what Jesus is doing here. Jesus is saying that scribes and the Pharisees should know the reason for the celebration. There is a real and genuine son that a father loves that was lost.

The father is genuinely going to celebrate because the son will be found. He is a lost son. He's not a prodigal son.

But what names have been given to these parables? You see, some have called the prodigal son, as I told you. I would say I hate people who use that, but I don't like that. He's not a prodigal son.

Some have called him the waiting parable, the waiting father, which captures the image of the father living in constant expectation of the return of his son. Some have called it the parable of the compassionate father and his two sons, two lost sons. That also captures the image of the father, as I will show you in this discussion, and the character and the portrait of the two sons in this parable.

Some have touched on a language that is not used in the text, love, but the image of a father who lost his son and called it the parable of a father's love. Let's turn to the text and begin to read—Luke 15 from verse 11.

And he said there was a man who had two sons, 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. Not many days later, the younger son got it all he had and took a journey into a far country, where he squandered his property in reckless living.

And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into the field to feed pigs. He was longing to be fed with the parts that the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat.

And he went and hired his own servants. When he came to himself, he asked how many of my father's hired servants had more than enough bread. But I perish here with hunger. I would arise and go to my father.

I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion. He ran, embraced him, and kissed him. 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. 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 and bring the father's calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. Punchline verse 24, for this son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost, and he's found. And they began to celebrate. Verse 25, now his older son was in the field.

And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked, what these things meant? And he said to him, your brother has come. And your father has killed a fattened calf.

Because he has, excuse me, received him back safe and sound. But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.

But he answered his father, look, this many years I have served you. I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed a fattened calf for him. And he said to him, son, you are always with me. And all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this, your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.

As we go into this parable, this is a moving parable, and I love this parable. You see, some key observations need to be made here. This is the longest of Jesus' parables we have in the New Testament.

This parable has two stages. One covers the incident with the younger son, and the second part covers that of the older son. Then, we see in this parable a violation of the cultural obligation to take care of parents.

As the ancient Jewish customs go, children have an obligation to care for their parents in their old age. And if you like, children were the retirement plan of their parents. It is integral that children honor their parents by taking good care of them and giving them a fitting and decent burial.

It is so dishonorable and shameful for a child to try to leave the children, the parents, with the intent of no return, regardless of what happens to them. The Pharisees should deplore this conduct as they heard Jesus tell the story. This younger son had violated a major cultural principle.

The general attitude of this boy as that of a prodigal son may be harsh. But you see, I see why people want to do that. That is Jesus' main point.

Nobody should like the conduct of this guy, but he would not like you to refer to him as a wasteful son because that's not the point of the parable. Notice something here that as a Jewish boy, he came to so much need and was so hungry that he hid himself from a gentile who happened to have pigs and would desire to be fed off the food that was given to the pigs. He could not have gone much lower.

These observations should be borne in mind as I walk through various aspects of this parable. First, looking at the parable of the lost son here. Notice that the son we are looking at is asking for his share of the estate.

What share did he have? He only has some portion of the inheritance when the parents die. He had not earned those estates. But you see, demanding an inheritance while the parents are alive in itself is dishonoring the parents.

He went for it again anyway. But notice what the father would do. The father would be like, no problem, you ask for that, I'll give you.

The other thing you should look at in this passage that is very interesting here is the possibility that this Jewish boy will go and hire himself to a gentile. Notwithstanding that he took off, as we are told, he took off his belongings, all his belongings, and left, implying that he had no intent of coming back. You see, like most young people today, when they rebel against their parents, they think the grass is greener on the other side, and they are going to go for it anyway.

In a rebellious spirit, they go up and do whatever they want to do. But you see, the conditions here are so bad, so, so bad. Let me walk you through how this guy left home, picking up a few issues from the parable.

The youngest son leaves home. You see, he left home with the intent of no return, verse 13. He packed all his belongings and took off.

He left nothing behind. Two, he went in verse 15, he squandered his resources in wild living. In verse 30, his older brother said to his father, this son of yours actually spent all the property and the resources you gave him with prostitutes.

I like to say in a classroom setting, it will be equivalent to saying this guy went to Las Vegas and spent all the money there with prostitutes. You see, one of the things you should note, leaving home brought him so low to work with a Gentile and desire to feed from a pig. And as a Jewish boy, as you have on the screen, I have for you the Leviticals, Isaiah, and all that.

Jews should not touch pigs. They should be defiled. But out of need, he will send himself out for this.

And imagine a Pharisee and a scribe listening to this condition about a son. Clearly, the verdict is there. He was sinning against God for dishonoring his father.

And the commandments are clear. The sins against his father and against God are unambiguous with his behavior. If you are a Pharisee or scribe listening to Jesus tell

this parable, you said, yes, I always thought this is what the tax collectors and the sinners are.

They have gone too far. So, the question still remains: why should Jesus dine with tax collectors and sinners? Oh, Jesus wanted the scribes and the Pharisees to know that the son turned around and came back home. The son returned.

The lost son will come back home. You see, we are told that in verse 17, he reconsidered his father's resources and said, if the servants in my father's house are treated much better, they have bread to eat. And here I am, and I have nothing to eat.

And nobody will give me anything to eat. You see, the journey home is going to be prompted by this strong desire to go back. In verse 18, he said to himself, I will go back, and I will tell my father that I have blown it.

I will tell my father that I have done everything I was supposed not to do. I missed the mark. Verse 18, you should know that the desire in him to come to his senses could be interpreted and understood in terms of radical repentance.

He accepted his responsibility in verse 18 when he said, I will say to my father, I have sinned against my father, and I have sinned against God. Notice in that statement alone, from verse 17 to verse 18, coming to verse 19, this son is acknowledging something. His arrogant behavior would cause him to ask for his share of the estate while his parents are alive.

His arrogant behavior, which made him believe that he could go to a foreign land and succeed and that he may not even come back home, crushed him. But you see, the repentant son has come to his senses and is adopting a humble posture when he says in verse 19, I will ask my father in the house because I know I have no right to be called a son. I will ask him if I could be a servant because in my father's house, servants are treated better than I am being treated out there.

You see, this son is going to return because he realizes that time with his father is a better place to be. And by the way, as we go through all this, could you capture the image of a father in the story? The image of a father who is willing to give the children what they ask for and allow them to face the consequences. And yet, the image of the father who has that big heart and is struggling while the son is out there looking for him to return.

You see, he returned to his father, changed for good because he noticed that he had no right to a place in that house. But I'll tell you something else about this parable that should not be missed. And that is the father's mode of celebration.

Notice verse 20. We are told that while he was a long way off, in other words, the father was expecting him, and he would stand at a place and gaze at a distance. While he was gazing at a distance, he saw a shadow of someone who looked like the son who had gone with all his possessions.

Except that this time, he saw someone who looked like the son minus the possession, perhaps looking wretched and naked, perhaps looking at someone who did not even have shoes on. The father's response was not fury. We are told in verse 20 he had compassion.

And he did what a Jewish father should not do. The Pharisees and the scribes had Jesus tell a story. He ran to meet the son who had done this to him before he could hear any word from the son, any sense of remorse from the son.

He ran to meet the son. He embraced the son and kissed him to show his deepest love and affection for the son. You know, the father would notice that the son had lost his status and honor.

He has been reduced to shame because of the choices he has made. But you see, when he brought him into the house, he ordered the servants to enrobe him, restore him his honor, give him shoes, give him a sense of dignity, and give him a ring to reinstate him. The father was pleased to see a son who was lost coming back to give him a shoe at his feet.

What a sign of a free man. The son wanted to be a slave. Friends, before we lose sight of what Jesus is doing here, let me remind you that his goal is to communicate to the scribes and Pharisees who are concerned about that question.

Why do you dine with tax collectors and sinners? To tell them that those you call tax collectors and sinners may have been already citizens of the kingdom. They may have changed their way of life and are so deserving. And there is a cause to celebrate.

There is a cause for a feast. There is a cause for a banquet. There is every reason why we should eat and celebrate the fact that these people you see, whom you call tax collectors and sinners, are back here.

But you see what the father is doing here. You know, I like to pose questions. When we get to some of these delicate subjects, people may be wondering why we should respond. How should we respond? How should we deal with this and all that? Notice that in this parable, if you are asking the question, why repeated emphasis on celebration? You will realize quickly that mealtime is a good time and social function to celebrate.

If you are asking in this parable, especially the last parable of the two sons, who represents the tax collectors and sinners? I will tell you that the older brother is the one we will look at in a few minutes. Why is dishonoring the father a big deal? Because a Jew should not tolerate that. Even a Pharisee, the exemption he may have to be able to deal with that body only when he's dealing with his own relatives, especially his own parents, who are dead.

But who represents the father in this parable? What is the older brother's problem? By the way, so why was Jesus feasting with tax collectors and sinners anyway? Let me give you some main thoughts. Notice here that the pattern of this parable ends with a climactic ending. This son was lost and is found again.

This son of mine was dead and is alive. Let's celebrate. Second, notice an important issue in this parable.

The attitude of the father versus the attitude of the elder son. You see, the father is willing and eager to celebrate the return of the lost son. The elder son is not eager.

He is quite upset. You see, we are seeing the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees and how God is willing to have these people, people who are lost, back in the fold play out in this parable. But the father's eagerness to restore the erring son with tender love and celebration is important for the Pharisees and the scribes to know.

Why should you dine with tax collectors and sinners? Notice something that is playing out in this parable that Jesus tells. If the elder brother accepted the invitation and came and joined, he would actually gain a brother who was lost and now returned. But would he? In the parable, which is silent, Luke leads us in suspense about whether the older brother will heed the invitation to come or not.

As if to say, let the Pharisees and the scribes figure it out. Are they going to join the time with the tax collectors and sinners? Or will they still be insisting on their righteousness? So Jesus had good reason to dine and celebrate with tax collectors and sinners, for they are lost and found.

The skeletal brothers are being invited to participate. The theme of the celebration is so important that we should not miss it. But before we miss the whole idea of what Jesus is heading at, Jesus has given a vivid picture of the scribes and Pharisees of what they should perceive.

These tax collectors and sinners. But quickly, before I end this session, look at the older brother. And let me end this session by drawing your attention to this older brother.

You see, his claims were true, as the Pharisees may claim. He did not rebel, but he remained loyal to his father. In fact, every part of the estate in the house is his because the brother's share was gone.

But notice that his refusal to go to the banquet culturally brings shame to the father, who is throwing a big party for a son who has returned home, and his older brother, who takes after him, would not even dare to come. But notice something else in the parable. I see students' reactions any time I point this out in class.

That you see, the older brother could not get himself to call his younger brother. When he came back, in verse 30, talking to his father, he said to his father, this son of yours, he could not say my brother, this son of yours, he took all your resources. He then goes on to exaggerate the conditions in verse 30.

He said this son of yours spent your money with prostitutes. Let us emphasize the sins he has committed. Oh, but Jesus is talking about how the father is so pleased that the lost son is back.

So, the question is this: if the scribes and Pharisees have put up that question, why do you dine with tax collectors and sinners? The question in silence, demanding a response to the scribes and the Pharisees, is this: will the elder brother join the party? Will the Pharisees and scribes join Jesus in that social event with the tax collectors and sinners? I don't know how far you have gone yourself as you follow these lectures. I don't know how rebellious you think you have been relative to your relationship with God. You may hear people who say there is no reason why God should accept you back.

You have done too much. You may hear people who tell you, you do not deserve to belong to the kingdom of God because the very things you have done are the very things the laws of God forbid anyone who is truthful of Jesus to do. But I'm here to tell you on four occasions in Luke chapter 15, Jesus said, to paraphrase, the lost is found; let's celebrate.

The lost is found; let's celebrate. In good faith, let's celebrate the return of the lost. And if you are the one who's lost, who thinks Arapaho is judging you, and you're standing with God and all that, I am also here to tell you that it does not matter how far you have gone, even to the point of a Jewish boy feeding pigs, the father is ready to embrace his calling you to come back.

This reminds me in closing of one of those old school hymns I so like that says, softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. He's calling for you and for me. Come home.

Come home. You who are weary, come home. Honestly and tenderly, Jesus is pleading.

He's pleading for you and for me to come home. The parable of the lost son reveals the father's heart and the inclusive nature of the kingdom of God. Those who carry the badge of sinners can now find a place with Jesus.

Those who carry the badge of tax collectors can now find their place with Jesus, and so can you. May I give you a personal invitation? If you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal savior, I'd like to remind you that he's eager to have you back.

While you are still a long way off, God is looking up to you and looking forward to the day you will set foot to come back home. A place of salvation. A place of rest.

A place of release. A place where God reigns. Where God has served, where God embraced, and where Jesus himself celebrates the fact that you, who may call yourself unworthy, find prominence in the house of God.

May God so bless you as you follow this lecture series. And I hope that you open your hearts as I'm constantly praying and asking God to make some of the things I process and share with you. Become part of my own walk.

That together, you would join me in striving to embrace the love of God. To embrace the richness and the vastness of the people he invites to his fold. He wants you and me in his household to dine with him.

To celebrate with him. Please do not tarry. Would you say yes? May God bless you.

May God grant you grace. May God break any spirit of rejection in you. May God reach out to you to let you understand how much love and how much care God has for you.

God is graciously stretching out his arms and waiting for you to come and embrace him. May you come and be embraced in the loving arms of God. Thank you so much, and God bless you.

This is Dr. Daniel K. Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 24, Parables of the Lost and Celebration, Luke 15.