



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

Chapter 15

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Introduction

- In chapter 15 Jesus gives three parable teachings to the crowds concerning God's patience and mercy in calling sinners to salvation by using common examples of daily life
- In each of the parables He also answers the criticism of the Pharisees who accuse Him of associating with sinners
- The parables are: the Parable of the Lost Sheep 3-8, the Parable of the Lost Coin 8-10, and the Parable of the Lost Son 11-32
- Of these three parables St. Ambrose writes: *By the parables of the sheep that strayed and was found, the coin which was lost and was found, and the son who was dead and came to life, we may cure our wounds, being encouraged by a threefold remedy.*



Introduction

- *"A threefold cord will not be broken" Who are the father, the shepherd and the woman? They are God the Father, Christ and the Church. Christ carries you on his body, he who took your sins on himself. The Church seeks and the Father receives. The shepherd carries. The mother searches, the father clothes. First mercy comes, then intercession, and third reconciliation. Each complements the other. The Savior rescues, the Church intercedes, and the Creator reconciles (Ambrose, Exposition of the Gospel of Luke, 7.207-8)*



Introduction

Chapter Outline

- The Parable of the Lost Sheep 15:1-7
- The Parable of the Lost Coin 15:8-10
- The Parable of the Lost Son 15:11-32

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- In speaking to a multitude, Luke 14:25, Jesus strongly challenged them regarding discipleship and commitment
- His strong challenge did not drive people away; it attracted them to Jesus
- *Tax collectors*, Who served the Roman authorities and were despised by the common people
- *Sinners*, Mean in general the degraded and outcast classes who were also drawing near to hear Jesus teach
- The Pharisees (the most influential religious party in Judea) and the scribes (the teachers of the Law) were high status members of Jewish society

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- They considered themselves to be among the "righteous" and interpreted the Scriptures and the Law very rigidly, often neglecting to follow the example of God's mercy and justice, Luke 11:39-52
- They criticized Jesus for His interaction with what they considered to be the ritually unclean impure and unworthy of society
- Jews were expected to keep themselves ritually clean for worship by avoiding anything that might transmit ritual uncleanness
- They saw themselves as "separated" and unlike those they saw as "unclean" sinners not fit to enter the Temple and offer God sacrifice and worship

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- The tax collectors and sinners who were drawing near to hear Jesus and the Pharisees, who began to complain, are representative of groups one and two in the Parable of the Great Feast (the previous parable in, 14:15-24, and they are at the center of this teaching)
- Their complaint is a repeat of their challenge to Jesus in Luke 5:30 when they said *Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*
- He responded by telling them a parable, to the Pharisees for their conviction; and to the publicans and sinners for their encouragement; and in vindication of Himself

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- *a hundred sheep*, And yet out of this large flock the good shepherd grieves for *one* which strays
- God cares about all the sheep in His flock and when one becomes lost, like a lost sinner, God, like any good shepherd, makes every effort to return that one to the flock
- And when that one sinner is restored to the church, God rejoices in his restoration
- It isn't strange that a sheep would be lost or that a shepherd would seek the sheep
- It does seem strange that a shepherd would endanger 99% of his flock for the sake of 1%

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- Either the safety of the 99% was assumed and there is already joy over them who were saved
- Or the point of this parable is in the *rejoicing* for the sake of 1% not in the neglect of 99%
- The salvation of every lost sinner is a victory for the Kingdom in which all the flock can rejoice
- The whole purpose of Jesus' Passion was to sacrifice His life for sinners
- In addition, the lost sheep would never save himself, or find the shepherd himself

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- If the shepherd did not take action, the sheep would have been lost
- Many believed that God received the sinner who came to Him the right way
- But in the parable of the shepherd and the sheep, Jesus taught that God actively *seeks out* the lost
- He searches after them
- Some see in the Lost Sheep the whole human race, and in the ninety-nine the Angels

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- And here the shepherd yearns for *rejoicing* from his fellows
- He would have others share in his joy in finding the perishing, suffering sheep
- This rejoicing with his effort to win the lost, Jesus had looked for among the rulers and teachers of Israel in vain
- The Pharisees not only declined the rejoicing of the tax collectors and sinners with the acts of Jesus; they positively condemned His works, His efforts, and His teaching
- *ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance*, It is probably a concern for the self-righteousness of the Pharisees

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15:1-7



- His call to repent had been addressed to all
- That all offended in many things; that for a man to say he had not sinned was a lying boast
- We may also say that *he comes home*, It was evidently at the Ascension that Jesus Christ returned home; for heaven is His home, John 14:2
- And it was at that time especially that He informed the heavenly beings as to His own doings (achievements) on earth, 1 Timothy 3:16

The Parable of the Lost Coin

15:8-10



- The lost sheep parable reveals the Shepherd's love
- He has given up Himself, and came down to earth, in search of the haughty and lost person and in love He embraced him, and carried him on His shoulders, and brought him back to the heavenly host
- In this parable, the lost coin, He offers us a picture of how the church should be like
- The church has the same qualities towards the fallen ones, and searches for them lovingly and is tender to them, and rejoices for their coming back

The Parable of the Lost Coin

15:8-10



- He used the silver coin as a symbol of the human soul
- Here the reason of the choice lies on the surface
- The coin is what it is because it has on it the king's image
- Man is precious because he too has the image of the great King, the spiritual attributes of Thought and Will, by which he resembles God, stamped upon him
- There is, perhaps, a special significance in the fact that the coin is lost *in* the house while the sheep strays *from* the fold

The Parable of the Lost Coin

15:8-10



- What seems implied here is the possibility that a soul that is precious in the sight of God may be lost even within the society, Israel or the Church, which is for the time being the visible house of God
- The woman in the story first brought light; then swept and cleaned the house, all along searching for the coin *carefully* and with deliberate intent
- She kept looking until she found the coin
- This is how the church, led by the Holy Spirit, will search for lost souls

The Parable of the Lost Coin

15:8-10



- First, they will put forth the *light* of God's word, then *sweep* and clean their own place, then *search carefully* for the lost
- When the coin was finally found, the woman was naturally happy
- In the same way, God is *happy* when sinners repent, in contrast to the religious leaders who complained when the tax collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus to hear Him
- The message of the teaching is the same as the Parable of the Lost Sheep "God's concern for the lost sinner and His desire that none should perish"
- It is the mission of Church to cherish her children and to keep them within the fold of the covenant family "not willing that any should be lost to sin"

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- This is the third parable in the series of teachings on the mercy and patience of God
- This Parable is only found in the Gospel of St. Luke
- It is called the Prodigal Son
- However, a better title is probably the "Parable of the Merciful Father" since the father's mercy is the focus of the story
- In the previous parables, the Lord Jesus did not find it sufficient to reveal God's relation with man

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- For God searches for the lost, as does the shepherd to his lost sheep, or as the woman who lights up the lantern and searches the house for the sake of the lost coin
- This parable appeals to the universal emotion of fatherhood, which yearns over a wandering child just because he has wandered
- Also we see the majority of the parable speaks of the younger of the two sons, but the older brother is clearly and importantly addressed at the end of the parable

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- We also note a further advance, in the proportion of one stray sheep to the ninety-nine, and of one lost coin to the nine, contrasted with the sad equality of obedience and disobedience in the two sons
- 1%, 10%, are bearable losses, but 50% is tragic
- In the immediate application of the parable, the father is the great Father of the souls of men; the elder son represents the respectably religious Pharisees; the younger stands for the class of publicans and sinners
- On a wider scale, the elder son may stand for Israel according to the flesh; the younger for the Gentiles

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- This parable is an answer to the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus' interest in sinners and is an insightful commentary on human conduct, illustrating the conflict between free-will and responsibility, estrangement and family love, and the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation
- But above all, the parable teaches the gift of divine forgiveness to a lost sinner "the kind of people who were seeking Jesus and the restoration He promised to those who repented and accepted the coming of His Kingdom"

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- In verse 11 Jesus begins His parable with the statement: "*A certain man had two sons ...*" He begins by setting the contrast in the story between the character of the two sons
- The younger son who left because he thought he wanted the absolute freedom to live as he wished without any obligations except to himself
- And the elder son, the father's heir, who dutifully served the father and stayed at home
- The younger son asked for *the portion of goods* motivated by foolishness and greed
- The father clearly illustrates God's love

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- His love allowed rebellion and, in some sense, respected human will
- The father knew that the son made a foolish and greedy request, yet allowed him to leave
- The young man left his home, and started, determined on pleasure or on living a reckless life
- No doubt it was fun while it lasted
- In the interpretation that lies below the surface, the *far country* is the state of the human spirit, of the Gentile world, in their wanderings far off from God

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The son was completely to blame for the wasteful, foolish living and spending
- He was not to blame for the *severe famine*, but was afflicted by it nevertheless
- His anxiety, hunger, and homelessness are the result of his rebellion and enslavement to sin, Romans 1:25, 6:6; Galatians 5:1, by which he has lost the freedom of being a beloved son of his father to become one whose sin has placed him under the power of Satan, Romans 8:21; Galatians 4:31, 5:13
- Driven by hunger and need, the son accepted work that was unacceptable and offensive to any righteous Jewish person

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- Because swine were unclean under the law, Leviticus 11:7
- The misery of the prodigal son may move our sympathy
- Yet his misery drove him to the good resolution described in the following verse
- In the individual interpretation of the parable, the mighty famine is the yearning of the soul's unsatisfied desire, the absence of its true food, of *the bread that comes down from heaven*, John 6:32
- In its wider range it is the craving of humanity for what it cannot find when appetites are not satisfied, and their everyday supply ceases—the famine, not of bread and of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord, Amos 8:11; the want of a message from the Eternal Father to sustain the life of His children

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- In his misery the prodigal son was finally able to think clearly
- In his clear thinking he did not think of how to improve conditions in the pigpen and didn't blame his father, his brother, his friends, his boss, or the pigs
- He recognized his misery without focusing on it, and instead focused on his *father*
- *when he came to himself*, In his years of riot he was not himself
- His previous state was that of his false self
- The real self was the repentant, not the prodigal he had been living

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The old man with his affections and lusts
- Now he was once more beginning to be in his right mind
- In his prepared speech to his father, the son showed his complete sense of unworthiness and an honest confession of sin
- He would not even ask to be treated as a son, but as a hired servant
- *'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to s,* What a testimony to the nature of the home he had left!
- But did he not know all this before he departed and while he had enough every day of his voluntary exile?

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- His heart being wholly apart from home and immersed in selfish gratification, his father's house never came within the range of his vision, or but as another name for bondage and misery
- Now empty, deserted, crushed, perishing, home, with all its peace, plenty, freedom, dignity, he starts to see the warm and living reality of his home
- This, then, was the first-fruits of repentance
- He remembers that he has a father, and trusts in that father's love; but he does not dare claim the old position which he had so recklessly cast away

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- He is content to be as one of the *hired servants*
- Spiritually, the first impulse of the repentant heart is to take the lowest place
- *Make me like one of your hired servants*, This is said not from a meek spirit, but to express the mean thoughts he had of himself, and the great desire he had to be fed from his father's table, in the meanest way
- He thought it would be an honor to him, could he be the meanest in his family, a doorkeeper in his house; which was more eligible to him, than to dwell in the tents of sin, or continue in this hungry and starving condition

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- A mere instant of remorse is not enough; a journey must be taken: the return must be at once
- He did not just feel sorry and think about repenting; he actually did it
- And so he came safe home; sad, suffering, poor, deprived, but still safe
- But although many who stray never escape from that sad country, it is not because they would be unwelcomed should they choose to return
- The father's love waited and never forgot

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- *ran and fell on his neck and kissed him*, Amazing love
- There was no mention of any kind of punishment
- The intensity of the father's reception was indicated by the fact that he *ran* (unusual for grown men in those cultures) and that he repeatedly *kissed him*
- This was especially remarkable because the son had disgraced the family by his prodigal living
- *his father saw him and had compassion*, The whole imagery of this part of the parable tells us how gladly the eternal Father welcomes the sorrowful penitent

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The father does not wait for the poor stray, but, as though he had been watching for him, sights him afar off, and at once takes compassion, and even rushes to meet him, and all is forgiven
- In the story of the parable we must think of the stray as coming back weary and hungry
- In the interpretation, the state of the repentant is that of one who is poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness Matthew 5:3,6, with knees that are feeble and hands that hang down, Hebrews 12:12, aware of his nakedness and needing something else than the “filthy rags” of his own righteousness, Isaiah 64:6 to cover it

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- Even though God does not oblige man to return to Him, yet, when He sees him from afar coming towards Him, he quickly runs to him not to blame him or rebuke him, but rather to embrace him and to kiss him
- The son began to recite his prepared speech and it is what he determined to say, and was allowed to say, having a deep sense of his sin and wickedness, and which was increased by the love and kindness his father had shown him
- St. Augustine contemplates on this by saying, “Let us understand ‘the coming to the Lord’ means to stay in the church, in faith. In the church we practice the confession of sins in an active methodical lawful way.”

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- It seemed that the father did not even hear his son's confession to the end
- Instead, he commanded that he be treated like a son, and not like a servant
- None of the four things brought to the repentant prodigal were necessities; they were all meant to honor the son and make him know he was loved
- The father did much more than merely meet the son's needs
- Some interpret the *best robe* as the "garment of praise", Isaiah 61:3, the clothes of righteousness, the new life and immortality with which it is the desire of the repentant to be clothed upon

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- Or, the wedding garment,' the robe of Christ's righteousness, Philippians 3:9;
- And the ring, as the seal upon the right hand, Jeremiah 22:24, must be the token of the special favor of the Giver, the seal of his calling and election, or Baptism, Ephesians 1:13-14
- The shoes must answer to that "preparation" or "readiness" which comes from the gospel of peace, Ephesians 6:15, and which makes him eager to do his work as a messenger who proclaims that gospel to others

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- And the shoes with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, Ephesians 6:15; Zechariah 10:12
- And have seen in the 'fatted calf' an allusion to the Eucharist
- St. John Chrysostom says the father does not address his son who has just returned, but he rather addresses his slaves
- The repentant one has come pleading, but he receives the answer through the merciful deeds offered to him
- Father Theophlactius sees those slaves as the ministering souls, or the priests who perform the baptism, and offer the word of edification, so the soul is clothed with Christ Himself

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- In contrast to the unclean swine, what does the fatted calf his father offers in celebration of his younger son's return symbolize?
- By contrast, the fatted calf the father offers upon his son's return symbolizes the restoration of communion with the father and the father's household in the same way a repentant sinner is restored to God's family in the Sacrament of the Eucharist within the household of the Church
- *my son was dead and is alive again*, These words contain the reasons of the above entertainment, and of all that spiritual joy and pleasure; in which the father acknowledges the returning penitent as his son

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The older son never lived a prodigal life, and was hard at work *in the field* even as the younger son came home
- Drawn by the sound of the party, *music and dancing*, he learned from a servant that his younger brother had come home
- *music and dancing*, It was an expressive image, used in accordance with the known customs of the country, to express joy
- These outward signs of gladness answer to the overflowing warm joy which fills the hearts of those whose sympathies with God's work in the souls of men
- Many have wished that the parable had ended with the moving and beautiful scene of the father accepting his son

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- Or, have regarded the remaining verses as practically a *separate* parable
- But we must not forget that the Jews, however guilty, were God's children no less than the Gentiles
- And Pharisees no less than publicans from the moment that Pharisees had learnt that *they too* had need of repentance
- The elder son is still a son, nor are his mistakes more wicked—though they might be more dangerous because more likely to lead to self-deception—than those of the younger
- Self-righteousness is sin as well as unrighteousness, God has provided for both sins a full Sacrifice and a free forgiveness

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- This eldest son is designed to represent the Pharisees who had found fault with the Savior
- Their conduct is likened to that of this envious brother
- *drew near to the house*, Spiritually, he only came close and took some steps towards entrance into it; namely, into a visible church; he came to hear the word, as the Scribes and Pharisees did; and to attend on ordinances, particularly at the administration of the ordinance of baptism, and seemed desirous of submitting to it in John's time; but never came to Christ in a spiritual way

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- St. Cyril of Alexandria comments, “Some refer to the person of our Savior as that fatted calf that the father killed when his son was called to conversion ... If any one imagines that the virtuous and sober son means the physical Israel, how can Israel honestly say that he never gave him a calf? Christ is to be understood as the sacrifice offered for sin. He was not sacrificed only for the Gentiles but also that he might redeem Israel, who by reason of his frequent transgression of the law had brought great blame on himself.”

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The older son was not happy that the brother was so joyfully received
- *his father came out and pleaded with him*, The father also loved the older son, and earnestly appealed to him
- He complained and felt it was an insult to his own obedience and faithfulness
- *I have been serving you*, Rather, I am your slave
- He does not say 'Father' and evidently regards the yoke not as perfect freedom but as dreadful bondage

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The obedience had all along been submissive and conforming, prompted by fear as the slave's obedience is
- The language put into the mouth of the elder son is clearly meant to represent the typical thoughts of the Pharisees
- They are conscious of no transgressions; but in that very unconsciousness lies the secret of the absence of any sense of joy in being forgiven, of any power to sympathize with the joy of others
- Their life has been one of uniform obedience and of performing their religious duties

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The angry elder son will not even acknowledge the prodigal as *his* brother; with bitter scorn and some disrespect he speaks of him to his father as *this son of yours*
- This is an expression of great contempt
- He did not call him "his brother," but "his father's son," to show at once his contempt for his younger brother, and for his father for having received him as he did

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- The father answers meekly, apologetically, as if conscious that the elder son had some right to complain, and content to justify himself for celebrating the younger son's return with a feast; not a word of retaliation
- This is natural in the story, and it also fits well into the aim of the parable, which is to illustrate the joy of finding the lost
- There is peculiar joy over one sinner repenting even though the ninety-nine be truly righteous, and over a prodigal returned even though the elder brother be a most exemplary, blameless, dutiful son

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- *for your brother*, The father said that to awaken this ill-tempered, angry, cruel son to a proper sense of his duty, both to his parent and brother
- There is, perhaps, a touch of tenderness as well as reproof in the way in which the sneering *son of yours* is met by *your brother*
- The elder son had forgotten that fact, and had almost denied his own sonship in his contempt
- This son of mine to whom I show mercy is your brother, to whom you should show tenderness and affection; especially as he is no longer the person he was

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- *was dead* in sin - he is now *alive* by the power of God
- He *was lost* to you, to me, to himself, and to our God; but now he is *found* and he will be a comfort to me, a help to you, and a standing proof that God receives sinners
- The father in the parable manifests his love for the elder son (symbolic the Jews), but he reminds his elder son and heir that the younger son must be restored to the family and his restoration must be celebrated in the communion meal

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- It is an indirect warning Jesus gives His people of the Old Covenant faith that they must be prepared to welcome the repentant "younger brothers" of the Gentile nations into the Kingdom He has come to establish
- In this parable the elder son has to make a decision "will he accept the father's rebuke and welcome his younger brother back into communion with the family, or will he reject his younger brother and harm his relationship with his father?"
- We are not told what decision the elder brother made, but we know that many of the Jews rejected the Divine Father's plan for the restoration of the human family in Jesus' Gospel message of salvation

The Parable of the Lost Son

15:11-32



- In each of the parables, the message to the tax collectors and sinners was clear: repent, come home to the father
- The message to the religious leaders was also clear: be happy when the lost are found, when they repent and come home to the father
- As a whole, we might say that these three parables suggest the searching, seeking work of the Shepherd Son, the Holy Spirit (working through the church), and the Heavenly Father



Discussion

- What lessons should the Pharisees have learned from the first two parables, and what lessons should we learn?
- What lessons can we learn regarding the consequences of sin and helping people avoid those consequences?
- Why do you think the father would split the inheritance for the youngest? Do you think that he knew what was going to happen?
- What is this story about? Money? Wild living? Stubbornness? Forgiveness? Anger?

Discussion



- Are you aware that both boys receive their inheritance at the same time? Who received more? (the older usually receives a double portion)
- Whom does the older son represent? What lessons should we learn?
- Think of a modern day story that would be like the Prodigal son