

“The Lost Son Is Found”

(Luke 15:1-3, 11-24 – Lent 4 – March 30, 2025)

Luke 15:1-3, 11-24 – ¹*Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.* ²*And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”* ³*So He spoke this parable to them, saying.... “A certain man had two sons.* ¹²*And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood.* ¹³*And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.* ¹⁴*But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.* ¹⁵*Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.* ¹⁶*And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.* ¹⁷*But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!’* ¹⁸*I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,* ¹⁹*and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”* ²⁰*And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.* ²¹*And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’* ²²*But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.* ²³*And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;* ²⁴*for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.”*

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save the lost:

The reason the Son of God came into the world was to save sinners from eternal death and damnation and redeem them for eternal life by His blood-bought forgiveness. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). This is why we often see Him with the kind of people described in our text: *“the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him”* (vs. 1). The self-righteous Pharisees complained: *“This Man receives sinners and eats with them”* (vs. 2). But as the Savior, Jesus loved them. He longed to lead even the worst of sinners to repentance and faith, that they might know His forgiveness and salvation.

It is with such love for the lost that Jesus tells the parable of the Prodigal Son. Here, we see how how **“The Lost Son Is Found”**: 1) **He is brought to see his true sinful condition**; and then, 2) **He is brought to see the Father’s forgiving love**. Here, we see also how we have been saved from our own sinful path and welcomed back by our gracious heavenly Father, through repentance and faith in His Son as our Savior.

1) He is brought to see his true sinful condition

Here Jesus portrays a rebellious son. This young man had enjoyed all the comforts of a good home. His parents had brought up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. They cared, not only for the temporal, but for the spiritual and eternal good of their sons. But this son got tired of such parental supervision. He began to feel his parents were too stale and old fashioned. Maybe he began to think the people at church were pretty boring, too, compared to the party life so many of his peers were enjoying.

So this rebellious son decided to break out of his perceived prison. He would leave home and be free to do as he pleased. He told his father: *“Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.”* It was unusual to request an inheritance before his father died, but he loved his father’s money more than his father. He received it graciously. *“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living”* (vs. 12-13). He felt so free, as he squandered his wealth in wild and loose living. As his older brother later complained, he wasted his father’s inheritance with harlots (vs. 30). He lived it up with wine, women, and song. He had no father to scold him, no mother to cry over his sins, no preacher to point God’s Law at his conscience. He felt like the happiest man alive.

Here, Jesus pictures what many do in a spiritual way. They leave behind the heavenly Father’s house and squander the riches of His heavenly inheritance in Christ. Perhaps they were baptized in the Church and brought up in the instruction God’s Word. But they began to consider Christian fellowship too stale compared to other company. They found new excitement in the pursuit of worldly wealth and pleasures. Worldly philosophies began to sound so wise, offering new light and freedom. Finally, God’s Word seemed too old-fashioned, narrow-minded, and constraining. So they left the heavenly Father’s house. They turned their back on Jesus to seek life in what the world offered.

But even some who attend church may do the same thing in their heart. Aren’t we all tempted to try to keep one foot in God’s house, while testing the world with the other? We are tempted to confess our faith in God’s house, but to hide our faith out there to make friends with the world. We are tempted to think we should loosen up on Bible teachings and moral issues and get with the times, like other churches. We are tempted to nourish pet sins, thinking: *“I’m doing what it takes to be happy. Everyone does it.”* Satan wants us to feel free to float about in the best of all worlds, to serve both God and mammon, God and the flesh. He would be pleased to see us remain in the visible church yet have God say: *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me”* (Matthew 15:8-9).

Whether by an outwardly immoral life or by a hypocritical holy life, Satan would have us join the lost son. He would have us leave the Father’s house, abandon his Word and saving faith in Christ, and forfeit the true riches and honor of His everlasting Kingdom.

Jesus pictures this in the parable with the lost son: *“But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything”* (vs. 14-16).

For a Jew, it was the lowest of the low. Pigs were considered unclean. Here, he saw just how unclean and covered with filth he had become in his sinful path. Instead of plenty in his father’s house, he was in poverty. Instead of the freedom in his father’s house, he was in servitude. In place of the honor of a son, he was in shame. And where were all those worldly friends who had stuck so close when he was the life of the party?

Many who have left the heavenly Father’s house, and turned their back on His Word, feel similar consequences. What comfort can all the wealth and pleasures of the world give when one finds himself facing want, suffering, terminal illness, or loss of loved ones? What help can worldly friends offer with their man-centered philosophy and religion that says, “You’re fine just as you are; you can pick yourself up!” What good is all that when the heart says: “No! I am empty! I am guilty! I am lost!” Then all the riches and pleasures of the world are as unsatisfying to the soul as the pods the lost son fed to the swine.

How often have we felt this way when we have wandered in paths of sin? Like the lost son, we found that what seemed to promise pleasure and happiness only left us feeling unclean and empty. Perhaps then we felt abandoned by those who did not turn out to be true friends. In our guilt and shame, we may have even felt forsaken by God, wondering: “How can the Father in heaven love me now?”

2) He is brought to see the Father’s forgiving love

The lost son was brought to see his sinful condition. His pride was broken. He knew he could not save himself. But now, he is brought to see his father’s forgiving love.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants’”” (vs. 17-19).

The Word of God he had been taught at home was doing its work in his heart. It brought him to repent and resolve to go back to his father. He would make no excuses for the path he had chosen to take. He would confess his sin. He knew he was not worthy to be called a son, but he only hoped his gracious father would take him in as a servant.

Who works such a change of heart? It is the Holy Spirit. By God’s Law in Scripture, He shows our true sinful condition. We need not wait to hit rock-bottom like this lost son

to confess with Psalm 51:3-4: *“I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.”* In our guilt and shame, we confess that we do not deserve a place as God’s children.

But by the Gospel, the Holy Spirit gives us faith in our heavenly Father’s forgiveness in Christ. As the lost son remembered his father’s love and resolved to return, the Spirit brings us back to the Father in daily repentance, with the promise in 1 John 1:7, 9: *“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

What a reception awaited the son as he returned home: *“But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”* He had planned to say: *“Make me like one of your hired servants.”* But his father was already telling his servants: *“Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found”* (vs. 20-24).

The son did not expect this welcome. But his father’s love for him had never changed. Day after day, the father had waited in hope for his wayward son to return. When he finally saw his repentant son from a distance, he even ran out to meet him. With joy he hugged and kissed him, welcoming him back home with the full rights of a son.

Here we see the forgiving love of God the Father. When we were lost in sin, in love God ran to us by sending His Son to save us. In His Fatherly love, God did not just overlook our sins. He took them all away from us and put them on His own Son, Jesus. On the cross, God made His innocent Son to be sin for us, punishing Him for all our sin and guilt. Like the father in the parable, He took away our filthy clothing of sin and shame. In its place, He put on us the best robe of His Son’s holiness, honoring us as His children. We have His promise in Galatians 3:26-27: *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*

Thanks be to God, who sent His Son to save the lost! We were lost in our sinful way, but now have been found. We were spiritually dead toward God; but He has made us alive in Christ. Now in our Father’s house, He sets before us the rich banquet of His salvation. In Word and Sacrament, we receive His forgiveness, salvation, and all the blessings of His children, as heirs of eternal life in Christ. Already, we have begun to eat and be merry. And in His heavenly house, we shall feast with joy in His loving presence forevermore.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.