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Parable of the Lost Son

Luke 15:1, 2, 11-32

Jesus' ministry was within a few months of its conclusion. Great multitudes were coming to hear Him. Sensing the compassion in His words and works, large numbers of people generally regarded as beyond the reach of religion (tax gatherers, harlots, "unspiritual" tradesmen) came to hear Him and found themselves welcome. The established religious leaders were offended and found fault. *"This man receives sinners, and eats with them,"* they complained. To this, He replied, *"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."* Before Him as He spoke were many who were confident in their status as just persons having no need for repentance. Jesus said Heaven had no cause for rejoicing in them.

Heaven's joy over one repentant sinner is made very plain in the three parables of this chapter. Perhaps the clearest and best known is the parable of the lost son. This story is, for all persons in all ages, the Lord's dramatic definition of God's great care for the lost. We must never lose sight of the father in the story of this parable.

1. What are some ways that people respond when they see others receive rewards greater than what they deserve?

2. What are some typical responses of people to God when they know that they have done wrong?

3. Read verses 11-16. What sort of things do you suppose drew the younger son to the distant country? Is the pull of such things any less intense today?

4. How do you suppose the Pharisees and Scribes (see v. 2) responded to the information Jesus gave in verses 11-16? Have you heard similar responses from religious people today?

5. Verse 17 speaks of the younger boy coming “*to his senses.*” What is it about his circumstances that caused this? Is there a contemporary truth shown here?

6. Read verses 18-19. What are some of the things behind the boy’s reasoning in these verses. Was his plan a reasonable one? Was it a surefire one? Do people ever reason this way today?

7. Verse 20 says that his father saw him “*while he was still a long way off.*” What is implied about this father? If you are a parent, can you relate to this? How?

8. Who does the younger son represent in this parable? Who does the father represent? How would a full realization of the identity of these two characters effect Jesus’ hearers?

9. Contrast the words of the younger son in verse 21 with the actions of his father in verses 22-24. In what way does this illustrate the difference between the way sinners see things and the way God sees them?

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10. Unfortunately, verse 24 isn't the end of the story. Read verse 25-30. How would you account for the response of this older brother? Was he justified in his boycotting the party? Who is Jesus' audience did the older brother represent?

11. In what way did the father try to console the older brother in verses 31-32. Put it into your own words.

12. What lessons were in this parable for Jesus' audience when this was spoken? How do you think they responded?

13. What lessons are here for us today from this parable? Do you know someone (perhaps even yourself) who could benefit from them?