

LUKE 15 THE SON OF AN EXTRAVAGANT FATHER

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All

these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

³¹ "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

This for me will be the final sermon in the series The Jesus People Met. It's a well-known passage to many people.

It's a Parable = a story told by Jesus to teach an important truth.

In this case – a story based on fact teaching an important truth about Jesus.

Jesus is the son of an Extravagant Father who having lost something valuable will go to any length to regain the lost thing.

The context for these three parables is that Jesus was criticised for welcoming ordinary people and hanging out with them, when religious people considered these people sinners or bad people who should be avoided because of that.

Have you ever wondered what was it about Jesus that made him so popular to ordinary people?

And not just ordinary people but people who were often on the fringe of acceptable society – tax collectors, non-religious people, women, immoral women, and immoral men.

There were a lot of people who were used to being looked down upon who found Jesus didn't do that. He clearly spoke it as he saw it, but not in an offensive way.

He had a gift of connection with people, he was not self-righteous, he valued people as people, and they found something attractive in his down to earth teaching.

But the religious people of the day, some of them anyway, disapproved of Jesus' approach.

And Jesus tells a series of stories to illustrate a point about God's willingness to forgive us. In fact, the religious people and the self-righteous people of the day had got God totally wrong.

They had grace and forgiveness wrong too. To them God's grace is incomprehensible. Beyond belief actually. It can be for us as well.

But the Grace of God is central to His being, and so central to the gospel that while we will never fathom its depth, we must remind ourselves of its power and truth daily almost so we never lose sight of God's riches at Christ Expense for us.

1. The Two Lost Things

*⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ **I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.***

It's a story about a lost sheep that Jesus wants us to put ourselves in the place of the owner – what would you do?

Search, find, rescue and bring home. Celebrate!

*⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins^[a] and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ **In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**"*

A valuable coin, probably part of her wedding dowry – worn on her forehead at her wedding. Valuable, and precious for its meaning.

Search, find, retrieve, celebrate!

Two simple parables about lost things being found.

But there's a catch in this. Parables are not simple stories that illustrate a clear truth about God.

Parables are stories that make you work to understand them. Alan taught that really well a couple of weeks ago. They require us to think about them and put in some effort to get the point.

So too here.

We've got former farmers here in the church. I'm sure they'd testify that there is some loss/wastage in farming sheep or any animals. An occasional loss is not a disaster. Neither would you reasonably put at risk 99 sheep for the sake of 1 sheep.

And if you did find the lost sheep you wouldn't throw a party. And kill a sheep to celebrate ...

Which I think is Jesus' point. What person among you ... None actually. That's way over the top. Totally disproportionate way to react to losing and finding a sheep.

Or the woman finding the lost coin. About a day's wages apparently. What she does to find it is quite reasonable – search everywhere ...

But the response upon finding it is more than usual, and more than the cost of the coin ...

The religious leaders would no more do what the woman in the story did than do what the shepherd did. No-one would ...

Unless of course the owner of the sheep and the woman with the lost coin, both of them valued the thing lost so much that they would do anything to find them, and were so full of joy when they did, that'd celebrate in a way that seems humanly speaking over the top.

And at the end of the first two stories Jesus draws a conclusion:

'7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven (more rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God) over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

If I ever preached a sermon on Jesus' sense of humour this verse would be included.

Ninety-nine righteous people not needing forgiveness!? Where are you going find them?

And just stop and think for a moment – Jesus is saying there is great rejoicing in God’s presence whenever someone repents of their rebellion before God and puts their trust in Him ...

So, these two parables teach a profound truth about God’s love for humankind, and how each individual matters to him.

But the third parable follows on in answering the derision of the religious leaders about Jesus seeking to save the lost.

2. The Lost Son

That brings us to the story of the lost son.
A few differences here – he wasn’t mislaid. He didn’t wander off and get lost ...

He effectively disowned his father. He dishonoured him and wished him dead and wouldn’t wait until he was before claiming his inheritance.

This son behaved in an outrageous way for the times and even for today ...

To the people who listened to Jesus and especially the religious leaders, this Son behaved outrageously. He cut himself off from his family and community and faith.

He deserved nothing. What he had done was unforgiveable. His sin was too great.

Except the father hadn’t got that message. He loved his child. With an everlasting love.

So, he behaves in ways totally consistent with that love and never gives up on his son. He will always be welcome home.

Even if that love is considered outrageously wrong in the times and even today.

He watches daily – he longs for the son to come home ...

And when he does, he barely allows the child to express his repentance and remorse – he smothers him with love and affection ...

He is over the top, filled with joy at having found his lost son ...

3. The Extravagant Father

There isn't a "Therefore I tell you" conclusion after this third story. But there's the reaction of the other son, and the response of the father.

In fact, it's the reaction of the other son that is where Jesus lands these three parables.

He's resentful – of the son returning, of the Father's response, he can't empathise with the Father's love and joy, resents the Father's forgiveness of his brother, and is jealous of the celebration.

The bottom line was that the son didn't get his father's love. For him or his brother. In fact, he didn't get his father at all.

At the time Jesus told this story, it was religious leaders and religious people generally who resented the willingness of Jesus to show friendship and even love towards people in society who were considered **sinners**.

I've been around long enough to know that secretly, if I was standing in the crowd, I might just (probably) be cranky at Jesus myself.

I like to know what the rules are, even if as a contrarian I think I'm above them at times. Because I really like fairness. It's not fair if others get a break that I haven't had.

Deep deep down, in my sinful heart I feel I'm special. In my deepest feelings of failure and sinfulness I just wish in my heart that on the last day Jesus will cut through the great crowd and welcome me first.

And I know I'm going to get a big surprise when I see who's there in heaven, and I hope I can keep my face straight and not show unhappiness or incredulity.

Friends, I think Jesus just might be saying we're more like the second son than the prodigal. Or that we start out like the prodigal son and end up like the other son.

The wonderful and sometimes hard to accept truth is God is extravagantly gracious, extraordinarily forgiving, overwhelmingly seeking our welfare for eternity.

Mark 3:5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts,

The Jesus that people met – the son of an outrageously forgiving, unseemingly gracious, extravagantly patient, loving Father to you, and me, and to all other reprobates in the world – people who need forgiving and fresh start.

Tony Campolo: "I remember telling my mother every time I get up to preach, I get nervous. And she said every time you get up to preach, God gets nervous."