

Luke 15: HG Bishop Youssef

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His Grace Bishop Youssef ~ فسوي ابن الالة فاين تاطع • LUKE 15: 1 - 10 ~ Bible Study

Introduction

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- The Lord Jesus Christ gives three parables concerning God's patience and mercy in calling sinners to salvation
- The Lord uses common examples of daily life as usual in His parables
- In each of these three parables, the Lord answers the criticism of the Pharisees and the religious leaders of Israel who used to accuse Him of associating with sinners and tax collectors
- St Ambrose wrote: "By the parables of the sheep that stray 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: 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."
(Exposition on the Gospel of Luke)

Outline

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

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

4:38

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:

- In Chapter 14, the Lord found many multitudes following Him and He gave them the requirements of discipleship
- Now we see that the tax-collectors and sinners heard these words and drew near to Him
 - The Pharisees and Scribes thought themselves righteous, interpreted the law, were of high status, and were the rulers of the people. They considered mingling with tax-collectors and sinners would make them ritually unclean, and not fit for worshipping God.
 - They separated themselves from these unclean sinners who were not fit to enter the Temple or offer a sacrifice
 - The Pharisees and Scribes are the first group of invitees in Luke 14. The tax-collectors and sinners are the second group of invitees in Luke 14.
- This is not the first complaint by the Pharisees
 - In Chapter 5, the Lord answered with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector

⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ ⁷ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

- God cares about all the sheep in His flock. When one becomes lost, God makes every effort to bring this person back to the flock. And when the one is restored, God rejoices in his restoration.
- It's not strange that the shepherd would seek the lost sheep... but it's strange that he would leave 99% of his flock... so either the safety of the 99 is assumed, or there is already joy for them. The point of the Parable is not the neglect of the 99%... but the rejoicing over the 1%.
- This is a responsibility on the shoulders of the clergy and Sunday School servants... if the servant and clergy do not take action, the sheep will remain lost
- God not only receives those who return to Him, but He actively seeks those who are lost
- The Lost Sheep can represent the whole human race that was lost, and the 99 are the angels, and God descended and was incarnate and died on the Cross to save us.
- The Shepherd yearns for rejoicing with his fellows
- The 99 just persons who need no repentance... these are the Pharisees who BELIEVE they need no repentance. God's call to repentance is for EVERY single person. Everyone needs repentance because all fall short of the glory of God
- "And when he comes home" refers to the Ascension and "his friends and neighbors" are the angels who rejoiced over the salvation that the Lord performed on the earth

The Parable of the Lost Coin

⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds *it*? ⁹ And when she has found *it*, she calls *her* friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ ¹⁰ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

- The Parable of the Lost Sheep reveals the love of the Shepherd - He gave up Himself, came down to earth, in search of the lost person and in love, He embraced him and carried him on His shoulders, and brought him back to the heavenly
- The Parable of the Lost Coin, the Lord offers a picture of what the Church should be like
- The Church has the same qualities toward the fallen ones and searches for them lovingly and is tender with them and rejoices in their coming back
- Silver Coin
 - The coin is what it is (i.e. has its value) because it has on it the King's image
 - Man is precious because he, too, has the Image of the Great King
 - Intellect
 - Free Will
 - Immortality
- The sheep that was lost strayed away from the sheepfold, but the coin was lost in the house... the Lord implies that there is a possibility that a soul, precious in the sight of God, may be lost even within the society of the believers (or the Church)
- How did the woman search
 - The woman brought light
 - Swept and cleaned the house
 - Searched carefully until she found the coin
- How does the Church search
 - Bring the light: The word of God; the Truth
 - "The word of God is a lamp to my feet"
 - Sweep and clean any wrong teachings in the church, mishandling of the commandment of God, wrong interpretations of the Scripture, etc. These things can make people lost INSIDE the church
 - "If we, or angels from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8)
 - St Paul heard about false teachings in Galatia and was firm in "cleaning" and sweeping the church
 - Why did the Ecumenical Councils gather against Arius, Nestorius, Macedonius?
To clean the Church so that the Lost Coin may be found
 - Find those who are lost

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The Parable of the Lost Son

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¹¹ Then He said: "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.

- The Lord starts the parable by setting the contrast between the two sons
 - The younger son left the house because he thought he wanted the absolute freedom to live as he wants
 - The older son, the heir, dutifully served the father and stayed at home
- The younger son asked for the portion of goods motivated by foolishness and greed
- The Lord used the example of a father and two sons, not a master and two servants
 - The Father clearly illustrates the love of God
 - His love allowed the rebellion of the younger son
 - Because He loves us, God respects and allows the freedom of our human will
 - The father knows that the son is making a foolish and greedy request, and yet allows him to make it

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*.

- *Far Country* is the state of the Gentile world
 - Worshipping idols and wandering far from God
 - The younger son symbolizes the Gentiles, the older son symbolizes the Nation of Israel
- The younger son was completely to blame for his foolishness
 - We cannot blame the father... definitely, the father advised him, but the son's free will is what brought on the prodigal living
- Famine
 - We cannot blame the severe famine... but he was affected by it
 - Sometimes God allows us to go through difficult times so that we might return to our house
 - The Famine is a famine of hearing the word of God
 - "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God,
"That I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine of bread,
Nor a thirst for water,
But of hearing the words of the Lord."
- Citizen of that country is Satan
 - Satan sends him to feed swine (unclean animals)
 - Driven by hunger and need, the son accepted work that was unacceptable and offensive to any Jew

- After he was an honored son in his house, now he is feeding swine and even desires to feed his mouth with the pods of the swine
- This misery drove him to repent and return to his father's house

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." '

- Nothing the world gives us can give satisfaction to our souls
- In his clear thinking, he did not blame his father, his friends or his brother or anybody... but he recognized that it was his own bad choices and decisions. He didn't focus on the misery, but on the right solution
- The solution is in the father
- "When he came to himself" - these years in the far country he was not himself. The true and real self is the repentant. The false self is the old man with afflictions and lusts. The true self is the one who recognizes God as our Father.
- "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare" - what a testimony to the nature of the home
 - When he lived there, he did not recognize the nature of the home
 - When he was out with all his money, he did not recognize the nature of the home
- While he was living in the house, his heart was apart from the house
 - His mind and his heart were in lustful pleasures
 - The father's house never came to his mind as a house of love - it was a house of bondage and misery
 - Many of us perceive the Church as a house of bondage... rules, rules... why all these rules? Don't do this and don't do that
 - But when we go to the far country and suffer from hunger and thirst, we recognize that the Father's house is the house of love
- Realizing the beauty of the house is the firstfruits of repentance
- He took full responsibility and confessed his actions to his father without giving any excuses. He knew that he is not worthy to be a son, so he pleads with the father to treat him as a servant
 - The first impulse of the repentant heart is to take the lowest place - like the parable of the tax-collector and Pharisee
 - He didn't say it out of humbleness, but because he saw himself in the meanest way "I am not worthy... the hired servants are better than me"
 - He thought it would be an honor to him to be the lowest person in that house
 - To be a doorkeeper in that house is better than to continue in this hungry and starving condition
 - "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness." (Psalm 84:10)

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.

- He did not just feel sorry or think about repentance, but he actually did it. He got up and went
 - Many people who went to the far country never left the far country
 - Not because the Father is not welcoming them, but because they had no desire to return to the father's house
- The father ran
 - God does not oblige anyone to return, He respects our free will
 - But when He sees us coming from afar, He will run for us
- The son started to recite his prepared speech, but the father did not even allow him to finish it
 - "Don't even finish that sentence - YOU ARE MY SON
- The four things are not necessities - but they are more than that
 - Best Robe
 - The garments of praise and of righteousness
 - The new life and immortality that we receive when we return to God
 - The wedding garment of the righteousness of Christ
 - Ring on his hand
 - The seal upon the right hand
 - The seal of the Holy Spirit that we receive in the Confirmation
 - Sandals on his feet
 - The preparation and readiness
 - When we are eager to go out, we put on our shoes
 - Fatted calf
 - The Eucharist
- St John Chrysostom: "The father did not address his son when he returned, but rather he addressed the servants. The repentant son came to the father pleading, but the father spoke to his servants to show the merciful peace of the father through the servants"
- Who are the servants?
 - The priests, the ministering souls who perform the baptism and pray the Eucharist, in order to vest the returning soul with the garment of righteousness
 - In the vow of commitment, at the ordination of a priest, he says "I will receive the repentant when he returns"
 - When a repentant returns to the church, we should not close the doors of the church in front of him, but to receive him joyfully
- When a repentant returns, he receives communion to abide in Christ
- All of this explains the joy at the return

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’

²⁸ “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

³¹ “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ”

- The older son never lived a prodigal life - he was always working hard in the field
- Joy and happiness
 - In those days, music and dancing was customary to express joy and happiness
 - We should all rejoice at the return of any prodigal son
- Some people wish that the parable had ended at verse 27 with the rejoicing
 - The children of God have two types
 - One who lives afar off (like the younger son)
 - Some people who are self-righteous and still living inside the house
 - We should not forget that self-righteousness is as sinful as no righteousness
 - The Pharisees need repentance, and so do the publicans and tax-collectors
 - The older son thought that he was not wicked like his brother... but the self-righteousness is worse because it's easier to deceive
 - It's easier to repent from a sin, than to repent from self-righteousness
- God offered salvation to both on the Cross - the Pharisees and the Sinners
- The older son drew near to the house but did not enter
 - People who go to the church, attend liturgies, etc. but never have a personal connection with the Lord
- "I have been serving you"
 - In the Greek "I have been your slave"
 - He regarded the yoke of service not as freedom but as bondage
 - He did not call his father "Father"
 - He was obedient, submissive, conforming to the rules... but all of this by fear. Obedience of slaves not obedience of children.
- "I never transgressed your commandment at any time"
 - Self-righteousness
 - The language of the Pharisees
- "And yet you never gave me a young goat"
 - Blaming his father
- "This son of yours"
 - Did not acknowledge him as his brother
 - Great contempt
- Joy vs Anger
 - Joy comes from forgiveness
 - "to whom little is forgiven the same loves little"
 - Because of self-righteousness, no forgiveness, thus, no joy
- The Father's Response

- The Father showed empathy, even though he did not nothing wrong
- He reminds him that his brother is "his brother"
- This is the message of the parable: "Yes, it is right to rejoice over a sinner who has repented"
- The Fate of the Older Son
 - The Parable ends before telling us if the older son entered the house
 - But we know from the Book of Acts that many of the Jews rejected the Economy of God for the restoration of the Gentiles into the family of God

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