

Luke 15:11-32

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Parable of the Lost Son Luke 15:11-31

¹¹A man had two sons.

¹² The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.	A son is lost
<p>For a son to ask for his inheritance <i>before</i> the father dies is unprecedented. If a son does ask, and the father divides his estate, the son shouldn’t sell the property until the father has died. To do so means the son implies he wants the father dead.</p> <p>The cultural norm is for the father to literal beat the son into submission. Also, the older brother doesn’t intervene, which may imply there is an estrangement between the two brothers or the father.</p> <p>His action to sell his portion of the estate is to wish his father dead and ultimately sever his relationship with his father. He is now permanently cut off from the family.</p> <p>If the father divides his estate, he still has the right to live off the income while he is alive, although the property (assets) are owned by the son. Only the son has the right to sell the assets.</p> <p>Furthermore, the community will cut the son off as well. The son has disgraced the father and the community stands behind the father.</p> <p>In fact, the community will perform a <i>qesasah</i> ceremony to officially excommunication the son if he is known to squander his wealth on or sell his property to Gentiles, or marry a Gentile women. Since they don’t know this, they don’t excommunicate him.</p>	
¹³ “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living.	Goods wasted in extravagant living
<p>The younger son quickly disposed of the property without regard for its property value. (Think liquidation sale.)</p> <p>The distant land implies he went to live with the Gentiles.</p> <p>We are not sure how he wasted all his money. The older son later accuses the younger son of wasting it on prostitutes, but those details are not provided in the text. The text tells us he spent it in “wild living.”</p>	
¹⁴ About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve.	Everything is lost
¹⁵ He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs.	The great sin
<p>This is the ultimate sin, to be hired by a Gentile and feed pigs. Pigs are unclean to a Jew.</p> <p>He didn’t make enough money to be able to feed himself. The farmer was taking advantage of the son’s desperation and paid him next to nothing because there was a famine and there were so many people needing to work for food.</p>	
¹⁶ The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.	Total rejection
<p>The wild carob pods had very little nutrition.</p> <p>Even the Gentiles rejected him and “were not giving” him anything to eat.</p> <p>He had already severed his relationships with his family.</p>	

¹⁷ “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger!’	A change of mind
Here the son has a <i>change of mind</i> .	
¹⁸ I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you,¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”	An initial repentance
<p>The son has a <i>change of heart</i>.</p> <p>Now he is willing to repent.</p> <p>According to the Rabbinic teaching, the son must repent and make reparations.</p> <p>A desire to make reparations is a sign of the son’s sincerity of repentance.</p> <p>The son wants to be a hired servant which is the equivalent to a skilled tradesman who lived in the village, not on the estate. He wants to live in the village (outside the home) and earn enough to pay his father back, i.e., make reparations. He is not planning on the father’s grace.</p> <p>Living in the village won’t be easy. The villagers will reject him.</p>	
²⁰ “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.	Total acceptance
<p>The father runs to meet him at the village edge to shield the son from the villagers’ hostility.</p> <p>Running was very undignified for an older man. In order to run, he must lift his robes and expose his ankles and legs, which culturally was very undignified and disgraceful. However, the father is clearly not concerned about the cultural norms and rules. He is more concerned about the son’s well being.</p> <p>His father accepted him as he was; filthy, sick, ...</p> <p>The father makes the reconciliation public at the edge of the village with the embrace and kiss. Actually, the son should be kissing the father’s feet. The kiss was a sign of the father’s reconciliation and forgiveness.</p> <p>The father also took upon himself shame by running and forgiving the son.</p> <p>The only way the father would have seen the son entering the village is that the father must have been looking for him to return.</p>	
²¹ His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’	The great repentance
<p>The son wasn’t able to finish his repentance speech. The father must have interrupted him with unexpected grace before he could finish his prepared speech. The father’s love preceded the son’s full confession.</p> <p>It is obvious that the father was prepared with a response of grace even before the younger son returned.</p>	
²² “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.	Everything restored, son reinstated
<p>The finest robe signifies the father’s best robe which implies total restoration with the father. This is how the father communicates total restoration to the villagers attending the celebration.</p> <p>The ring or signet ring is a sign of the father’s trust in the son.</p> <p>The shoes are a sign that the son is a free man in the house, not a bond servant.</p>	
²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast,	Goods used for celebration
The selection of a calf implies that the feast was large and included the villagers.	

The purpose of the large feast was also to reconcile the boy to the entire community.	
²⁴for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.	A son is found
The purpose of the celebration was to celebrate the son being forgiven and reconciled to his father.	

²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working.

When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house,²⁶and he asked one of the servants what was going on.	He comes
He should have asked an elder.	
²⁷‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’	Your brother safe A feast
The younger son’s safe return was paramount. The older son wants permanent, uncompromising rejection for the younger brother.	
²⁸“The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him,	A father comes to reconcile
The younger son insults the father in private. The older son insults the father in public. The father <i>begged</i> the older son, which means the father was seeking his son out and wanted him to reconcile. The father should have disciplined his older son for his disobedience. But, instead he loved him. The older son should have been at the front door greeting people as the host.	
²⁹but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.	Complaint 1
The older son did greet the father with “dear father”. The older son claims he has slaved for the father. This refers to the Pharisees extraordinary fixation on the Talmud/Mishna (rules). Yes, they were a slave to their own rules. The extra rules prevented them from loving the younger son and would have required them to excommunicate him from the village/synagogue. Whereas, the father broke all the rules (cultural norms) to love and reconcile with the son.	
³⁰Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’	Complaint 2
The older son has utter disdain for the younger son when he refers to him as “this son of yours.” He is not referring to him as a brother. The older son is insinuating that the younger son was involved in illicit sex and other immoral behaviors, but he doesn’t really know for certain.	
³¹“His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours.	A father tries to reconcile
The father refers to the older son as “dear son” showing love. Whereas the older son doesn’t greet his father with a title and therefore disrespects the father.	
³²We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’	Your brother is safe A feast
No final stanza provided by Jesus. We are not given an ending to the story.	