

Gleaners Bible Studies C 2

THE PARABLES OF LUKE'S GOSPEL (PART 2)

Study 1

Lost and Found

Read

Luke 15

This chapter of Luke's Gospel comprises three parables with the same theme. Three things were lost; a lost sheep, a lost silver piece and a lost son. Each parable looked at in this way, has its own special atmosphere and setting. Before you study this chapter in detail, think about the meaning of being spiritually lost. Some speak of 'lost sinners' and describe souls as being 'lost'. The Lord Jesus said, **"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"**. (Luke 19: 10) These three stories which are three aspects of one parable, will undoubtedly widen your understanding of what it means to be 'lost', and give you a wonderful picture of God's love.

SETTING. It is important to notice the circumstances in which Jesus originally taught this parable. Tax-collectors and the sinners were all gathering around to hear him. (Luke 15: 1) Tax-collectors were despised by the Jews, not only because they were employed by the Romans but because many of them cheated their own people by over-charging. (See Luke 19: 8) The 'sinners' were people who had no interest in the finer points of the religious law, which the Pharisees considered all-important. To them, these people were just an ignorant, godless rabble. That is why we read of their reaction in Luke 15: 2. How could Jesus, they reasoned, possibly be a man of God, if He associated so freely with the country's riff-raff? Little did they realise it, but their misguided muttering was to trigger off some of the most wonderful teaching in the New Testament! Christ had a magnetic attraction for the outcasts of society. They flocked to Him and were more than ready to listen to His words. This story of lost things reveals something of His deep feelings of grace, mercy and love towards sinful men and women.

STORY. "He spoke this parable to them". (verses 3) Note **"this parable"**, not 'these parables'! It is one story, given three facets, to deepen our understanding. A lost sheep was a common enough occurrence in the life of Eastern shepherds. A lost drachma or coin – not worth more than about three pence in today's money, yet valuable enough for the woman to seek carefully until she found it. And a lost son – I wonder how often this had happened? Can you enter into the sadness of that home as the wayward boy went away? The deep longing of the father is seen as he waits for his son to return. All is then forgiven by the father, but the older boy's behaviour shows that he cannot forgive. Let the contents of these stories grip you and then learn the lessons from the parable.

SUBSTANCE. Lost – Sought – Found. We will look at this sequence of events in each section of the parable.

a) **Lost.** Linked with the idea of being lost we have the stupidity of a sheep, the inertia of a coin, and the wilfulness of a wayward son. The first story (Luke 15: 3-7) asked a question to which there could only be one answer. It would be obvious to everyone that the shepherd's active concern would be for the one sheep astray in dangerous country, and he would do everything he could to recover it. In that part of the world, flocks tended to be quite small, so that even one sheep would be valuable. This wandering sheep possibly realised it was lost, but it was powerless to do anything

about it. The Lord Jesus did not hide the true facts regarding the sinful condition of men. Like sheep, we wander away from the path God wants us to take – **"every one to his own way"**. (Isaiah 53: 6) Danger and death are in the way of the wanderer, for to be lost means this and so much more. Yet it is possible to be lost and not know it, and this brings us to the second story, **Luke 15: 8-10**, which again is a simple but telling illustration.

The **"ten silver coins"** (verse 8) may have formed a married woman's head-dress or necklace (the equivalent of today's wedding ring), or they may have been coins, one of which was equal to a day's wage for the working man. So that, whether sentimentally or commercially, the lost piece of silver was valuable and important to the owner. But down in the dust and dirt of the room, the coin knew nothing of its lost condition. There are many people today who are lost sinners without being aware of it. They never stop to give eternity a moment's thought. But is this all that being lost means? No! The Lord Jesus goes further. To be lost means, in the final analysis, to choose our own pathway and, like the prodigal, determine to go away from God.

This third story in the parable is one of the most familiar stories in the whole Bible. According to Jewish law, the younger of two sons would be entitled to one-third of his father's estate. (See **Deuteronomy 21: 17**) The division of the property and goods was usually made after the father's death. But in this case the rebellious, self-willed younger son demanded his rights in advance. (verse 12) Soon afterwards, he left for some far-off country where he squandered his wealth in wild living. (verse 13) We are not told how long this wild extravagance went on, but eventually he ran out of money. Even worse, the country in which he was living was hit by a terrible famine. (verse 14) With an empty purse and an empty stomach, he looked for work, but the only job available was looking after pigs. (verse 15) Nothing could have been more disgusting for a Jew, to whom the pig was "unclean" by law (See **Leviticus 11: 7 and Deuteronomy 14: 8**) If you have ever had anything to do with pigs, you will know how the smell of these animals can taint you. It seems to get into your clothes, hair and even the very pores of your skin. How true this is of sin! It taints and contaminates everything and everyone who comes into contact with it. There is no better picture of the lost condition of sinners, than the hopeless state of the prodigal, away from home, feeding pigs!

b) **Sought.** The Lord Jesus is the great Seeker of sinners. How much did it cost Him to seek the lost? As much, and far more than it cost the shepherd to go out into the mountains on a cold night to seek a lost sheep until he found it! It cost the Lord Jesus His life at Calvary. How much did He care? As much and far more than the woman who was willing to search in every dusty corner to find the coin hidden in the dirt! Though sin brings ignorance, still the Lord Jesus is willing, by the Holy Spirit, to seek for a very long time to find the sinner. How long will He wait? Think about the prodigal's father longing, watching and waiting for his son to come home. Will our heavenly Father do less? Each section of this parable is a picture of the triune God seeking sinners who are lost.

Notice in **verses 16 and 17** that it was when he was at rock bottom, the young man **"came to himself"**. There is a certain 'madness' about sin, it can make people 'lose their senses', and go to all sorts of extremes. Possibly you have known cases where people caught up in sin; lose all sense of shame, self-respect, decency and morality. This young man was brought to his senses, realising that even his father's servants were better off than he was. (verse 17)

There is a high cost in low living! Notice too that he immediately put his thoughts and words into action – **“he arose, and came to his father”**. (**verse 20**) Repentance means more than recognising sin, or even regretting it; it means forsaking sin and turning to God.

c) Finding. In each case that which was lost is found. The sheep is brought home on the shoulders of the shepherd. To be found means an end to the HOPELESSNESS of sin. The silver coin is restored to its proper place. So to be found means an end to the HELPLESSNESS of sin. The prodigal comes home - with all the feasting and rejoicing that this brings. To be found means an end to the HOMELESSNESS of being away from God in sin. We are brought home to God.

SEQUEL. **Verses 20-24** are the real heart of this third story, showing the father's loving forgiveness as immediate, (**verse 20**) compassionate, (**verse 20**) and extravagantly generous. (**verses 22-24**) The sequel to each part of the parable is JOY. But it is a certain kind of joy. It was the needy that were found and the finder who rejoiced – **“Rejoice with me!”** each one said. The Lord Jesus said that there was joy in Heaven over the one sinner who repented more than over many who felt no need to repent. What a shaft of accusation at the self-righteous Pharisees. They criticised, but stayed outside of the blessing, like the older brother. The challenge to the Pharisees was obvious – as it should be to us. There is no place for peevishness, envy, jealously or pride in God's family. Let us rejoice at God's goodness to others, and at His goodness to us, remembering that in neither case is it ever the result of merit on our part, but always of mercy on His!

Study 2 The Friend at Midnight

Read Luke 11: 1-13

Luke's Gospel has quite a lot to say about prayer. It is good to read it bearing this in mind. If you look carefully, you will find seven different occasions on which the Lord Jesus is praying. Prayer is very necessary in every Christian's life. If the Lord Jesus, as a man, found it so essential to pray, how very important it must be for us to follow His example.

Prayer is not just ASKING for the things we want or need. There is much more to prayer than that. It is an ATTITUDE of heart and life which brings one very close to God in everything. Our present study is of a very brief parable, rather strange in some ways, but a story which teaches us something vital about prayer.

SETTING. The setting of this parable is at the end of one of the prayer-times of the Lord Jesus. Notice in **verse 1**, **“As He was praying.”** Every Christian should identify with the disciples when they asked Jesus to meet one of man's greatest spiritual needs, – **“Lord, teach us to pray.”** (**verse 1**) And how grateful we should be that the New Testament preserves for all time the answer He gave in this passage. These words in **verses 2-4**, together with the parallel version in **Matthew 6: 9-13**, are undoubtedly the best known in the whole Bible. We usually call them 'The Lord's Prayer', although in fact they really form 'The Disciples' Prayer.' The Jews were quite familiar with set, formal prayers, and Rabbis often taught them to their followers. (Notice the end of **verse 1** where John is said to have done the same thing) The disciples therefore, probably used this prayer as it is, but what is more significant for us, is that it is the model for ALL prayer – and in three ways.

Firstly, because of what it says about God. It puts God first. Notice the three petitions in **verse 2**. Prayer is not meant to be a sort of selfish shopping list. Our first concern should be for God's glory and for His will in everything. (**See Matthew 6: 33**)

Secondly, because of what it says about man. **Verse 3** shows that man is utterly dependent on God's goodness and provision, even for his physical survival.

Thirdly, because of what it says about sin; the three final petitions are all about the same subject, which obviously indicates that holiness of life, should be the Christian's constant concern. (**See 1 Thessalonians 4: 3**)

STORY. The story in **verses 5-10** is simple enough, but not without humour! In a tiny Jewish home, there would normally be just one room, and the family would sleep huddled together for warmth on a raised part of the floor farthest from the door. This 'split-level' design allowed for the domestic animals to sleep in the same room, but on the lower level, nearest the door. For the man of the house to open the door to a midnight caller would almost certainly mean disturbing the sleeping children, (**verse 7**) – to say nothing of causing chaos among the animals! Hence the plea, **“Do not trouble me”**. But in the story, the needy visitor refused to give up and presses his need, so his friend HAS to get up. Persistence wins the day! His need was supplied because of his 'shameless asking' – for this is what the word 'importunity or persistence' literally means. We would perhaps call it 'cheek'!

SUBSTANCE. Here the point of the parable is not so much what we say, but HOW we pray, when we come to God our Father with our needs. I often wonder if the earnest way in which the disciples had found the Lord Jesus praying, had led to their request, **“Lord, teach us to pray.”** They wanted to have the same earnestness when they prayed. He taught them how to pray and the kind of approach which should be theirs. This is very important. But I believe the key phrase of this story is found in **verse 13**, **“how much more will your heavenly Father...”** Notice how the whole passage dove-tails together. The questions in **verses 11-12** are about fathers, who for all their sinfulness, give good things to their children, (**verse 13**); the householder in the parable is a father, but also a friend (**verse 5**) who, even if reluctantly, will not leave his friends in need. At the beginning of the Model Prayer, Christians are encouraged to pray to **“Our Father”**. (**verse 2**) God is not a miser, reluctant to give; on the contrary, He longs to pour out blessing on His children, for whom there is no greater gift than the Holy Spirit. (**verse 13** and compare with **Psalms 84: 11**) With this in mind let us learn three further lessons from this parable.

1. We can bring ALL our needs to God.

To the man in the parable, shortage of bread was a desperate need. He had none – his friend had some. So he ASKED. **Verse 9** tells us to do just that with God. We have so many needs. I wonder if YOU begin the day with prayer. Do you quietly look forward to your day and then seek God's guidance, for help with your work, for protection from danger and especially for strength to be faithful to Him? **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you”**. (**verses 9-10**) God makes it His business to be responsible for caring for ALL the needs of His children. Look at **Philippians 4: 6**. Anxious about nothing – praying about everything. Make this your golden rule of life!

2. We can come to God at ALL times.

What a cheek it was to wake his friend up at midnight! Could not he have chosen a better time? But it was not a question of choosing his time, was it? It was at the time of NEED that he came. There was an urgency about his demand. We too, can come to God at any time. Just a quiet breathing of our needs and He is ready to hear. God can be to us a friend at all times as well as for all needs.

3. We can depend on God to KNOW just what to give.

Look at **verses 11-12**. Each need in our lives is important. Would we give people stones when they asked for bread? Or would we give anything else foolish for that matter? Common sense can answer the questions of the Lord Jesus here. So, when God sees a need, He knows what to give. In His wisdom He never makes a mistake. We can trust Him with every problem we shall ever meet in the Christian life.

SEQUEL. No sequel is given here. At **verse 14** the scene changes. I think we must imagine the sequel – the effect that this parable would have on the lives of the disciples. But even as you try to imagine this, let the teaching of the Lord Jesus challenge your own heart and life – **“Lord, Teach US to pray!”**

Study 3

The Rich Fool

Read

Luke 12: 13-34

The parable we are now going to study is a challenge to selfishness, greed and materialism. Some people have said that the Lord Jesus had an in-built antagonism to riches and to rich people. Both Socialists and Communists have claimed that He would support their ideas, but the Lord's association with the poor was never with a political motive in view. He was voluntarily a poor man Himself – **“He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.”** (2 Corinthians 8: 9) His mission to the poor was evident because He felt their need deeply and sought to share His kindness and love with them. We shall see that His challenge to the rich was because He saw the danger of their material possessions taking pre-eminence in their lives and thus robbing them of the true wealth that could be found only in Him. Let us study this parable carefully with this in mind.

SETTING. In this parable we find someone trying to involve Christ in a personal family affair. A man seems to have interrupted Jesus, asking Him to arbitrate in a family squabble over inheritance. (Luke 12: 13) We can appreciate what problems the Lord Jesus would have made for Himself had He become so involved. His care for people was wonderful. No expenditure of time and energy was thought too great. But His answer here shows His great wisdom: **“Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?”** This answer also proved His deeper understanding of the situation. **“Take heed, and beware of covetousness.”** It would seem that the questioner was desiring to possess that which was not rightly his. So Jesus pointed out to him that mere possessions do not make a man rich. (Luke 12: 15) He then drove His point home with the simple but telling parable in **verses 15-21.**

STORY. A man has a bountiful harvest. By his industry and skill as a farmer, and through the favourable trends of climate and conditions, he produces more than he is able to cope with. Barns are filled to overflowing, so bigger ones must be built to store the excess corn. Wise thinking, we might say! But then the farmer sits back and considers the future. He has much goods stored up for many years to come. He says to himself: **“Soul ... take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry...”** But God – the God he seems to have forgotten, calls him a fool! That very night his soul will be required - his prosperous life will be over. Greed is sheer insanity, because the moment we die all material possessions are lost.

SUBSTANCE. We can now look at the way its lessons are given to us. The Lord Jesus in **Luke 12: 22** says: **“Therefore, I say to you”** and begins to give practical advice on the place that riches should hold in the life of a disciple. If the point in **verses 13-21** was: ‘Be warned’, the key to **verses 22-34** is ‘Be encouraged!’ – Your Father is King. In warning about greed, the Lord Jesus had told a parable about a wealthy and successful farmer. But wealth can be a stumbling-block not only to the rich but also to the poor. The one is tempted to gloat and the other to fret; one sins because of how much he has, and the other over how little he has. Yet Jesus taught that it was wrong to be anxious even about necessities. The whole lesson of **verses 22-34** could be summed up in one phrase – **“do not worry”.** (verse 22) Verse 25 illustrates the futility of worry very well. It has been suggested that the word **“cubit”** possibly refers to a length of time rather than height, as a cubit was about 21 inches, and to grow that much taller would hardly be called **“to do the least”** (verse 26), or as the NIV puts it **“this very little thing”**. The sense seems to be that no one can make his life any longer by worrying about it – in fact, the reverse would almost certainly be the case! Jesus backed up His arguments with a number of simple illustrations from nature. The birds of the air (verse 24), and the flowers and grass in the fields (verses 27-28) are vivid examples of God's amazing and adequate provision.

The Bible does not encourage Christians to be lazy or careless, or to rely on others for their maintenance – notice what Paul says in

2 Thessalonians 3: 7-12 but we must link our personal responsibility to God's permanent reliability, and remember that as far as the necessities of life are concerned, our Father knows what we need. (verse 30) The Lord Jesus showed that while ravens and lilies quietly enjoy God's provision, people and nations feverishly seek after wealth without seeking God. Our only concern should be that we seek God's kingdom, by living godly, obedient lives. God promises that if we make that OUR primary concern, He will make all other things HIS concern, which is a cast-iron guarantee that we shall receive all that we need. **“Your Father knows...”** (verse 30)

SEQUEL. The sequel is possibly two-fold.

Be warned! – if you died tonight, **“whose will those things be which you have provided”.** (verse 20) What good would they be to you in eternity? None! You cannot take them with you!

Be encouraged (verse 33) – You can have **“a treasure in the heavens that does not fail”** So, **“set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”** (Colossians 3: 2) **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (verse 34)

Study 4

About Servants

Read

Luke 12: 35-48; 16: 13; 22: 24-27

We are now going to look at some of the things that Jesus said about stewards, or servants. One of the names given to the Lord Jesus in Old Testament prophecy is that of God's Servant. In **Isaiah 42: 1**, we read these wonderful words concerning Him, **“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold.”** He was God's perfect Servant.

It is therefore interesting to come to the Gospel of Luke and find that at various points in His ministry, the Lord Jesus told stories about servants and their service. He was the perfect illustration of the principles which He laid down in His teaching, and speaking of Himself, He could say, **“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve”.** (Mark 10: 45) It is great to think that as He calls us to be His servants, He knows what true service was like. Paul, in **Philippians 2: 7** tells us that **“He (Jesus) taking the form of a servant”** John tells us that at the Last Supper Jesus actually washed the disciples' feet (**John 13: 3-5**). Luke tells us that He said to His disciples, **“I am among you as the one who serves,”** (Luke 22: 27b). Let us in our service for God, always try to follow His supreme example.

Our last study in this series will deal with the parable of the Pounds, which is a story of service. We shall look at the meaning of serving and the results and rewards of faithfulness in service. In this study we are going to look at the character of the servant. This is important because what we ARE is reflected in what we DO. This was true of the Lord Jesus in His service and it will always be true of us.

SETTING. The parable, or parables, are found in the passage following our last study. (Luke 12: 35-48) In some ways the thoughts follow on. What we possess is given to us in trust by God. We are just servants of these things to use them for God's service. The setting is that of servants who are put in charge of the household while their lord is away. The idea is that of care and watchfulness, so that at whatever time the master arrives, all is in readiness.

STORY. Peter asks the Lord who this parable is intended for. The Lord Jesus answers by telling a more detailed story. It is a story that sums up the qualities desirable in a faithful servant, who is seen as a wise steward and is rewarded by being put in charge of the household's goods. The position of authority and responsibility is the reward for faithfulness. There is an alternative course that the servant might be inclined to take. Taking advantage of his master's delay, the servant could become wasteful and tyrannical with the other servants. The punishment is measured by

the degree of unfaithfulness. Notice that the story ends, not with rewards for faithfulness, but with punishments for unfaithfulness. It highlights the character of the servant.

SUBSTANCE. We can learn from this story, and other passages about servants, something of the qualities required in one who serves the Lord. Once we become Christians, it is good to ask as Paul did, **“Lord, what do You want me to do?”**. (Acts 9: 6) The Lord will answer us and give us clear direction if we have a sincere desire to do His will.

Notice first in this parable it tells us that a servant must be **READY** to serve. **Verse 35** speaks of being “girded” or dressed for service. We must always be looking for opportunities to serve, not running away from work. If you read Nehemiah, when the wall was being built, you will read of those nobles who **“did not put their shoulders to the work”**. (Nehemiah 3: 5) They were half-hearted and unwilling. God’s servants must always be ready to do His work. Then, a servant must be **RESPONSIBLE** in his attitude to the task that is given him. Look at **verses 42-43**, He is carefully planning to meet the various needs of the household. He wants to be sure that when he faces his master, the household will appear well-kept and in order. Never treat the Lord’s work lightly. Whatever little job the Lord gives you to do, He expects you to do it well. Perhaps you are young in your faith, not having much experience. Make sure you begin by doing all God’s work to the best of your ability, knowing that it is work for the King of Kings.

Then of course, we must be **HUMBLE** in His service. How very sad to see in **Luke 22: 24-27**, the disciples still arguing about which of them should be considered the greatest, when Jesus had just been telling them of His impending death. He condemns their attitude as downright worldly – the kind of thing godless kings did (**Luke 22: 25**) He then went on to say that Christian behaviour should be exactly the opposite. (**Luke 22: 26**) No true servant of the Lord is proud and arrogant. There is no room for such things in the Church. There should not be in us a desire to be chief above others. We saw earlier the example of the Lord Jesus in **John 13: 1-5**, as He washed His disciples’ feet. He was Lord of all – yet He became servant of all! This is the kind of character we should seek as we serve Him.

Furthermore, a servant should be completely **COMMITTED**. (**Luke 16: 13**) He cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve both God and our own selfish desires for material things. It must be one or the other. As you serve the Lord, make sure your service is wholehearted – ‘All for Jesus, all for Jesus ...’. Finally, a servant must be ready to **GIVE ACCOUNT** of his service. When the Lord Jesus comes again, any service we have done for Him will be reviewed and rewarded. Think carefully over verses in **Luke 12: 35-40**.

SEQUEL. As a sequel to this lesson, I want to leave with you the last part of **verse 48**, **“To whom much is given, from him much will be required.”** God will never ask us to account for those things which He never gives us. Whatever service He gives us to do for Him, be it small or great, He will require an account for that – and no more. What Jesus was saying in effect was that while all servants are responsible, those with special privileges have special responsibilities. Knowledge, responsibility and accountability all go together, so we must give serious thought to all the Bible has to say about God’s perfect justice, both in granting rewards and in administering punishment. (**Luke 12: 47-48**)

May these studies stimulate you to serve the Lord to the very best of your ability.

Questions

Study 1

LOST AND FOUND

1. What was the Pharisee’s attitude towards Jesus, and why was it so?
2. What two pictures of a lost sinner do you see in the stories of the lost sheep and the silver coin?
3. State briefly how this parable demonstrates that the triune God (the Trinity) is at work seeking lost sinners.
4. a) What was the reaction of the owner when the lost sheep was found?
b) What did Jesus say happens when a lost sinner is found?
5. What lesson can we learn from the attitude of the older brother?

Study 2

THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

1. Give two occasions from Luke’s Gospel when we read of Jesus praying.
2. Why is the prayer in **11: 2-4** so significant for us today?
3. a) What is the key-phrase in the passage?
b) How does it link the section together?
4. What does the passage teach us about God?
5. What have YOU learned from this study about prayer?

Study 3

THE RICH FOOL

1. a) What is the main challenge of this parable?
b) Why did the Lord Jesus challenge the rich in this way?
2. What did the rich farmer fail to take into account?
3. Why can wealth be a stumbling-block to the poor as much as to the rich?
4. What great lesson was Jesus teaching from nature?
5. Say briefly what is the two-fold teaching of this passage.

Study 4

ABOUT SERVANTS

1. What have you learnt about the Servant-character of the Lord Jesus from this study?
2. Give four qualities that should be found in a true servant of the Lord.
3. What should be our chief aim in the Lord’s service?
4. What will be expected of us as servants of the Lord Jesus at His coming again?
5. Why is it erroneous to think of God as a God of love who will not punish anyone?