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Parables of Lost Things (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Parables of Lost Things (Part 2)", Steve Gregg delves into the story of the prodigal son from Luke 15. He discusses the cultural context of the time and how the young son's actions would have been scandalous in Middle Eastern culture. Gregg draws parallels between the story and the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. He emphasizes the importance of repentance and acknowledging one's actions against God, rather than just oneself or others. In the end, Gregg highlights the Father's forgiveness and generosity toward his wayward son, serving as an example of God's love for all.

Transcript

Luke 15, 11 says, A certain man had two sons, 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. Now, I recently, actually, I was asked to speak on this parable at George Fox College earlier this year, so I did some research on the cultural background here, because I wasn't really sure for many years whether this was customary or not for somebody to request his inheritance before his father was dead.

In our society, basically what we call an inheritance is what is doled out to the offspring after the father dies. So I wasn't sure whether it was otherwise in Israel or not in those days, but I got a very good book on the cultural background of the peasant culture in Israel in biblical times, and it dealt particularly with this parable. In fact, it was a book about all the parables in Luke, and therefore it had a whole chapter dealing with this.

And it documented very thoroughly from ancient writings and from even the modern peasant culture of the Middle East, which he says hasn't changed much in thousands of years. They're still pretty non-technological and pretty traditional. They pass on their values from generation to generation as they have for hundreds of years.

He documented from many sources the fact that it was never customary in those days for a son to ask for his inheritance before his father was dead. It would have been the supreme insult to his father. It was a way of saying, I wish you were dead.

I'm tired of waiting for you to die. Give me what I will get at your death now. Now, of

course, the father was under no obligation whatsoever to honor this request.

In fact, if the father had not protected the son, he probably would have been subject to stoning by his village, because disrespect to a father like that in Middle Eastern culture is scandalous in the extreme. And so Jesus, when he's telling this story, of course, he's making it up to illustrate a point. But his listeners must have been aghast at the very suggestion.

I mean, you don't have to go any further in the story to be astonished at the insolence of this son that he asked his father before his father was even dead to give him what belongs to him, of his inheritance. And that this author that I read said that he interviewed, because he spent 30 years or something in the Middle East as a missionary, he said he interviewed many peasants of the Middle East from both Arab and Israeli cultures of the region. He said, you know, what would the reaction be? How would it be interpreted if the son came to his father and said, could I have my inheritance in advance, like now? And he said the response he got invariably was the father would be outraged that the son was essentially saying, I wish you were dead now.

And that's how it would be understood by Jesus' original listeners. And so you can imagine the outrage that arises in his listeners at this suggestion. However, one of the things that's shocking at the very beginning of the story is that the father says, okay, apparently without protesting or rebuking, the father just goes to the vault, opens it up, pulls out all that he owns and divides half of it between the two brothers.

Now, the older brother apparently had not asked for it, but he gave it to him anyway, it would seem. And then the younger son goes off and does his thing. Now, does this have a specific representation to anything in the spiritual life, or is this just part of the stage props of the parable? I don't know.

As I pointed out in the previous two parables, there are certain details that we would not wish to press in order to establish upon them alone some theological premises about, for instance, Calvinism or Arminianism. Therefore, it may not be proper to do so here. However, there is a pretty obvious parallel that no one would probably disagree too much with.

And that is that when man in the garden sinned against God, he did so as an expression of a freedom that God gave him. God gave him that freedom to make that kind of a choice. The father in this story could have said, I'm not going to give you any freedom to go off and use my stuff and bring reproach on my name and so forth.

But the father made himself vulnerable in this way. His son made an outrageous request. But the father said, well, that's what you want to do.

I'll let you have your freedom. I'll give you what you want. And essentially, God has done

that same thing too.

Now, there are not complete exact parallels in this story because in reality, if a person makes that decision and never repents of it, the father himself will judge. God himself will judge those who live and die in rebellion against him and use their freedom in this way. Whereas in the parable, we don't see any evidence that the father would have come in and vindicated his interests in this case.

The son may have died of starvation in the absence of the father. But the father doesn't, there's nothing in the parable that indicates the father is going to hunt him down and chop his head off or anything like that for his misconduct. So the parallel is not exact.

However, in the parable, it is certainly suggested that the boy was going to face death as a result of his decision if he did not repent. Not at the hands of his father, but at the hands of his own consequences of his own actions. Because he had left himself, he'd taken himself out from under the covering and protection and provision of his father.

And he was left to the mercy of the elements and of his countrymen. And there wasn't much mercy there. And therefore, he found himself in a decreasing, deteriorating state of well-being.

First of all, he spends all his money and there's nothing left. Then there's a famine to complicate matters in the land. And so he begins to be in want.

He begins to not be so wealthy anymore. In fact, he got so poor that he joined himself to a citizen of that country. We're to assume this is not Israel.

He was a Jewish boy who left the country. Took his father's money to another country. And he sent him into the fields to feed the swine.

Now, feeding swine is a colorful touch that Jesus adds to the story. Because of course, we all know that the Jews would not come near a swine. The Jews considered swine to be among the more filthy of the unclean animals that the Bible declared they should not eat.

And yet, Jesus really paints this picture with some effective detail. Because it says, And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods, these would be carob pods, that the swine ate, but no one gave him anything. Now here, a Jew, a self-respecting Jew, having any dignity, would not even come near a pig, and would never eat a pig.

But this kid was not only willing to do either of those two, he would have been willing to eat the swill that the pigs were eating. Now, the suggestion is he wasn't permitted to. His master didn't allow him to do that.

No one gave him anything. Now, it's hard to know exactly how much that's to be

pressed. Does that mean his employer decided not to pay him for his work? As well as, you know, him demeaning himself to go out and do this work that would be a shame and indignity to any Jew to do, or most people even, but especially to a Jew, because of the nature of the beast he was feeding.

It almost sounds as if his employer didn't even pay him. And that he ended up being a volunteer. And he was getting ripped off, even by the guy who employed him.

Because you'd think that if he got a job from this guy, he wouldn't need to lust after the swine swill. Seems like if he was employed, he'd have some kind of remuneration. At least meals would be provided.

And he wouldn't be craving to eat the pig slop. And so, it seems to indicate that his employer defaulted on his obligations to him. And no one was giving him anything.

And he was really at his wits' end. It says in verse 17, But when he came to himself, which is an expression that means when he came to his senses. Now, what he says to himself on this occasion is so self-evidently true, that one wonders how it is he didn't come to this decision earlier.

How it is that he could allow himself to be reduced so low before thinking rationally like this. And the answer would seem to be, that when he came to himself and decided that he should go home and repent to his father, and hope for his father's mercy, and generosity toward him, that either A, he was too proud to ask, and he would rather be brought to such a base situation that he was even starving to death, feeding pigs in a foreign country away from his home and family with nothing to call his own. And he'd rather be brought all the way to the bottom, where he had to look up to see down, before he would stoop and humble himself and even consider going back and admitting his fault.

That's one possibility. And there are no doubt people who've never repented, for no better reason than that. It's not that they don't realize that there's a better life for them in Christ than what they're experiencing.

But the fact that they'd have to admit that everything they've done so far is stupid, that everything they've done so far is evil, is simply beyond their ability to do, given the amount of pride that they're holding on to. And some of these people, God is very merciful to bring them really far into the gutter. Way down to the bottom of the pit, just so that they'll maybe, under this kind of pressure, come to themselves and be willing to say, hey, I don't have any pride left.

I mean, if I'm staying away from God because I'm too proud to admit I'm wrong, what can be left of my pride if I'm brought this low? Pride is a little out of place here. I'm as humiliated as a person can be. And it's the mercy of God that he will bring such proud

and self-sufficient people and so forth to the end of themselves, the end of the rope, so that there's no more pride to keep them away from him.

Another possibility of why this son didn't sooner come to his senses and make the decision he did is possibly because he wasn't sure his father would have him back. Now, we see in the sequel how when he did come home, his father ran out and kissed him and received him back. We can see that the son didn't, if he didn't know that his father would show him mercy, the son didn't know his father very well.

It's possible that he was not only ashamed, but afraid to return home up to a point until he was starving to death to say, hey, what do I have to lose? If he kills me, at least I die quickly. Here, I die from hunger, you know. It's possible he totally miscalculated his father's character and disposition.

It seems almost certain that he must have in the first place. He must have never known his father very well or else why would he have left him? I mean, it's true there are temptations of the big world out there. And if you have enough money in your pocket, you can go out and distract yourself for a fair amount of time.

But to bring such an insult on his father and risk permanent alienation from him must have stemmed from the fact that he had no idea what a wonderful person his father was and what a pleasant man his father was to be with. He apparently had had slanderous opinions about his father and those maybe did not permit him earlier than this to decide to go home. Maybe his father would be angry.

Maybe his father would be vindictive. Maybe his father will have him thrown in jail, debtor's prison or whatever. Hard to say.

In any case, he eventually got to a place where he had neither pride nor anything else to lose. And he got smart and said, well, here I'm starving to death. Here with hunger.

And my father's hired servants, I mean, these guys are just his employees, are better off than I am, a lot better off because my father pays his servants well. So he says in verse 18, I will arise and go to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.

Now, there's good repentance in this phrase, in this statement. Remember, Jesus made this up as far as we know. He could have, of course, been telling you of an actual case, but like most parables, there's no reason to suggest that he has an actual case in mind.

He's seeking to illustrate something spiritual and he's tailoring the account to fit the point he wants to make. Therefore, I think we could say that the words in this boy's mouth represent words of true repentance because the boy's repentance was accepted at faith value by the father and it resulted in rejoicing and the pardoning of all ills of the

past. And therefore, I think that we have here one of the best specimens from one of the best sources, Jesus, of what true repentance involves.

Now, there's two elements in this that I brought up previously when I taught on foundations. When we're talking about repentance, I pointed out this speech that the prodigal son intended to make to his father. This was what was in his heart.

And there's two things about it that certainly must be present in true repentance. One is that it is God-centered first. Not self-centered, not people-centered.

It is first of all God-centered. He said, Father, I have sinned against heaven. That's a Jewish way of saying against God because the Jews were reluctant to use the name God too frequently and too loosely.

They often, in situations where they would have said God, preferred to say heaven. They'd say heaven bless you, kingdom of heaven instead of God bless you and kingdom of God frequently. Likewise here, it's very obvious he says, I've sinned against heaven.

He means I've sinned against God, the inhabitants of heaven, and in your sight. Now, of course, in the parable, the father represents God. But as far as the, you know, if you put yourself into the story, his father is really just a person, a human, that he is wrong.

He's insulted him. He's been ungrateful to him. He's taken his father's possessions prior to his father's required time to surrender them.

And he's wasted them and lost them permanently. His father has, in fact, been wrong. And he admits it.

But first he admits that he's sinned against God. Now, this is important because much of what is sometimes passing as repentance in people's lives, not only these days, but at all times in history, it comes quite short of that. There is an acknowledgement of guilt.

It may be there is an expression of being sorry for what they've done. But in many cases, it is not realized that the real offended party has been God. Now, there are other offended parties.

But the degree to which God has been offended and the degree to which this is an outrage and a heinous crime against God is seen in the fact that David, for example, when he sinned with Bathsheba, we know he did a lot of things wrong there. First of all, he defiled another man's wife. That was a sin against her and her husband.

Then he went further and murdered the man, which was a further sin against him and his wife. And his actions brought repercussions in the life of the child that was conceived through that. The child died, was sick.

First, her husband died. That was David's fault, too. David sinned against a lot of people.

He even sinned against the whole nation because he was the king. And his example was a scandal. Nathan, the prophet, however, pointed out to David when he confronted David about this, that David had given the enemies of God great occasion to blaspheme.

In other words, David's actions, while they may have affected negatively many other people in a serious manner, the principal problem was that he had brought reproach upon God and his sin was against God. And when David wrote a psalm expressing his repentance about this, in Psalm 51, which I'm sure you're familiar with, when he talks about his thoughts, about his sin and expresses his regrets and his repentance, he makes this statement to God, which almost doesn't seem true. In Psalm 51, 4, David says, Against you, you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight, that you may be found just when you speak and blameless when you judge.

Now, he says to God, and this is, as the psalm title says, written after he had gone to Bathsheba, he said to God, I've sinned against you and you only. Well, how could David say such a thing when there are so many other parties negatively affected and hurt by his actions? Well, I think we have to assume that David had enough moral sense to realize that other people had been wronged by him in this too. However, in his act of repenting, any number of parties that may have been inconvenienced or damaged by his actions were totally eclipsed by the overwhelming issue of the fact that he had sinned against God.

Why would that be such an overwhelming issue? Well, arguably, any damage that has been done to people by our actions, although we have been in the wrong, no one can say for sure they didn't deserve it. I mean, maybe in this particular case, they were innocent of any wrongdoing, but they've done similar things to other people that may be in the past. Nobody is lily white.

Nobody is pure. No one can say they don't deserve to be judged. All sinners deserve to die.

And if something we did ruin their life or brought an end to it prematurely, that's a wicked thing we've done. But it can't really be argued that they deserve better than what they got. It's an injustice because they, while they don't deserve better than what they got, God wanted them to have better than what you gave them.

But no one can say that God deserves to be sinned against. When has he ever done anyone any wrong? God has rights that he's never violated. God has, that is, he's never, he's never forfeited by misbehavior.

All people have. And while it is a very saddening thing to realize how many people may have been hurt by our sins, if our repentance is genuine, we'll be not focusing on the people and the natural circumstances that have been negatively affected, and nor on us and how much we're suffering because of it, but we'll be concerned about what has

happened to God's reputation in all this and how God's name has been maligned and besmirched by our misconduct. I remember talking to somebody who told me that the night before they'd been counseling a drunk who was seemingly wanting to get his act together, wanting to repent and so forth.

And this drunk had said to the person who was talking to me the night before, the drunkard had said, I just can't stand to think of what I've done to my wife and my children. And this person counseling says, I told him, don't think about what you've done to your wife and children, think of what you've done to yourself. And I said, both answers are wrong.

First of all, while it is true that the prodigal son came to himself and saw the condition he was in, obviously, by the way, probably nobody repents without a certain degree of self-interest. We just aren't that virtuous. We're just not that pure in our motives to do the right thing if there's nothing in it for us in most cases.

However, once he had come to the position of repentance, what he had done to himself wasn't even worth mentioning. What he had done to himself was deserved by his actions. And when a person is truly repenting, they're not going to be focusing on, look how I've ruined my life.

Look how I've been hurt. Look at the damage I brought on myself. Nor is his principal concern going to be, look at the damage I've done to my wife, kids, or whoever.

Although that is an issue. It's far less of an issue than what have I done to God. And this is important because it affects the whole way we look at sin in general.

Because there is in our time, and I think it's crept into the Church a fair amount, the assumption that if you can't identify any victims of a certain action, that it's not a very bad thing that is done. Several years ago, when I was in my 20s, I guess, California, I don't know if this is national now, but California made laws that legalized victimless crime. Particularly, of course, a victimless crime would be something like homosexual conduct or adultery or fornication between unmarried parties.

Before that, there were laws unenforced on the books that made those kinds of things behave, those behaviors illegal. And they decided these laws are outdated. There's no one hurt by this.

If two consenting adults want to go out and mess up their lives, that's their business. There's no victim here. The court shouldn't be concerned with enforcing these kinds of things.

It's a victimless crime. Of course, while it may be true that the courts of the land shouldn't be running around trying to prosecute every sexual offender, because there are other criminals out there who are doing much more damage to society, it may be,

but this decision, of course, was just a marker on the dissent toward loss of awareness of the fact that there is a victim in every crime. Even if you are involved in private use of pornography or something like that, and you say, well, no, this doesn't affect anyone but me.

It sure does. It affects God. It's ripping him off.

And repentance is due because God has been offended by our actions, not because we can point to or cannot point to others who've been hurt. And yet, if we can say, well, nobody was hurt by this. It wasn't that big a deal.

We think the sin is much less important than if we can look to a whole string of people whose lives were damaged by our behavior. Then we realize it's severe. But what we have to understand is the sin is equally severe, regardless of how many human victims there are, because in comparison, a multitude of human victims counts for nothing compared to one infinite, eternal God who's a victim.

And while, of course, once you have repented before God, you need to seek to make restitution, if possible, to man as well, you need to take cognizance of the fact that other parties have been hurt too. And the prodigal son did. He also mentioned that he had sinned against his father.

But first and foremost, his repentance was God-aware, aware of what he had done against God. And until that is grasped, I believe repentance doesn't exist yet in the biblical sense of the word. The other thing I want to point out about this is that once the son repented, his words of repentance expressed an attitude of having forsaken any claim he had to any rights to be a son.

Now, of course, as we read on, we find that the father ignored this statement. When he said, I'm not worthy to be your son, the father ignored it and said, my son has come home. Let's treat him like a son and put a royal robe on him, give him a ring.

Let's have a party. My son is back. And the father, of course, showed grace and mercy far beyond what the son could bring himself to even request.

The son could never, in his present awareness of his sinfulness, he could never think for a moment that his father should restore him to sonship. Although his father could, it was the furthest thing from his son's mind that he would or should. The son hoped at best he might be allowed to be a servant, an employee, which would certainly have less privilege in the home than a son.

But his statement, I am no longer worthy to be your son, reflects a very important characteristic of true repentance. And that is, it humbly acknowledges that there are no privileges that can be claimed because of the sin. That as soon as I acknowledge my sin, along with I must acknowledge that I don't deserve to be restored.

Now, God, in his mercy, will restore me at least to forgiveness and possibly even other things I've lost. But he's not required to restore me, for instance, to any position or to any state of innocence that I've forfeited. I mean, think of it.

You know, if a woman goes out and lives promiscuously and she gets pregnant, she comes back and God forgives her. She comes back to God, repents, and God forgives her. She doesn't expect that God's going to remove her duty to care for that child.

Her life is going to be impinged upon by that child to that child's adulthood. There's going to be inconvenience in that girl's life. And her repentance isn't going to change that.

And she doesn't deserve to ask that it be otherwise. Whatever consequences her sins have brought upon her are owned and accepted by somebody who's humbly repenting, saying, I don't deserve to be relieved of this situation. I suppose back when I talked about repentance, I probably told you the example of a friend of mine, a friend of mine and Jim Soderbergh, who down in Santa Cruz had a ministry to homosexuals.

And there was one particular case I was told about by this guy. A homosexual who had become a Christian, had repented, initially it would seem, but later fell back into the homosexual lifestyle. And while there, he contracted AIDS.

And then he decided he wanted to come back to the Lord, of course, as he was dying of AIDS. And my friend who was counseling various homosexuals visited this fellow in the hospital in his final weeks before he died. And this guy's attitude was striking.

The guy said, I can't believe these Christians, these so-called Christians. Here I am dying of AIDS and I've repented of my sins and these Christians don't want to come near me. They're afraid of me.

This is back in the 70s when AIDS was still, or early 80s, I guess, when AIDS was still new enough that no one was quite sure how it's passed along. In fact, I think there's still a lot of confusion about that. But back then, everyone was jumpy about it.

First of all, there weren't that many people with AIDS yet. And very little had been said authoritatively about how it's transmitted. And a lot of Christian people, though they hoped this guy had repented, a lot of them were keeping an arm's length from him, no doubt out of fear of contracting AIDS from him.

He wasn't getting many visitors. And he was bitter and angry about it. He said, where's this love that Christians are supposed to have and this forgiveness and so forth? Well, my initial response when I heard this story was on the side of the person who had AIDS, I thought, boy, this guy's, he's got a point.

Christians are being a little bit unchrist-like in this respect. Certainly Jesus would go and

visit him. And hang out with him and so forth.

But then I thought about it a second time more clearly. I thought, well, that may be true. Probably it is true.

Probably Christians should go and visit him more. But what about him? What about his attitude? Was he not willing to acknowledge that whatever isolation or ostracism he had brought upon himself through going out in this lifestyle and contracting this disease through sin, that this was simply part of the consequences that he should accept. It's part of his repentance.

I mean, if you go out and contract leprosy in a sinful lifestyle and nobody wants to come near you because they might get leprosy from you, are you going to blame them or you for this circumstance? If you're blaming them, you're not thinking clearly about your own responsibility. You're still thinking you deserve to be restored back to your place of privilege and back to your place, back to, you deserve to have things back the way they were before you sin. And true repentance takes full cognizance of the fact that sin deprives forever of any privileges or rights.

Now, deprives of any rights or privileges, but that doesn't mean deprives you of the thing itself because God often gives us more than we have any right or privilege to have. But our sin definitely forfeits, is a forfeiture of any position or rights that we ever thought we had. And it's important to remember that.

I mean, when we consider Jimmy Swagger and Jim Baker and these guys, and if we express any doubts about the repentance, there are some who think we're being merciless. You know, I didn't give the guy a break. He did it without sin, let him cast the first stone.

You know, these guys have repented. What they did was not the unforgivable sin, et cetera, et cetera, we hear. But if they really did repent, why did they immediately after claiming to repent, say, now I deserve to have back my radio empire, my TV empire.

I deserve to be trusted again. I deserve to be rich again. I deserve to be at the head of this organization again.

After all, I've repented. God restored me. Why don't you guys restore me? This is just not the attitude of someone who's really repented.

I could not imagine if, I mean, if I fell into that kind of a sin, which I guess I can imagine that happening, it hasn't, and I hope it never shall by the grace of God. But had I ever fallen in such a sin, I would stand here today convinced that I don't deserve to ever be trusted again. I mean, I should hope to be, but I wouldn't expect that I had the right to demand it.

If I fell, if I betrayed the trust of the body of Christ in my post and later came to my senses, part of coming to my senses would be the realization that I don't deserve to have the body of Christ ever and trust anything to me again. If they ever do, it's the abounding mercy of God. But I can't claim it.

And that's the words that Jesus put in the mouth of the son, I'm no longer worthy to be your son. I have forfeited any right to hope that things could be as they were before I repented, before I sinned. Now, it's important to recognize this.

Now, the son was restored. Of course, in the parable, he was restored to relationship with his father. But there were some things that were never restored.

He never got the money back, nor did his father. His father suffered the eternal loss of that. And so did the son.

Things weren't quite the same. The father was willing to share what he had left with his son, but it was a poorer family as a result of the son's misbehavior. The son had, no doubt, a reputation around town after this, which he may have never been able to shake off.

He was not respectable. He was not innocent. He had lost that.

He'd obviously lost any respect he ever had from his brother. Whether he ever regained it, we never learned. But what I'm saying is, while a relationship with God can be restored through repentance, we need to think twice before we engage in any sin.

Realizing that there may be things lost, and there always will be something lost. Innocence, if nothing else. That will never be able to restore.

That once you have sinned, you will have occasion to wish you could go back to that turning point, to that point of decision, just before you sin, and to have things the way they were before then. You can't. You can't get your virginity back.

I realize that there are teachers going about, I've heard them on Dobson's program sometimes saying, we teach young girls that they can have their virginity back before God. I'm not sure what that means. It sounds like a bunch of mumbo-jumbo to me.

I mean, to me, virginity is a physical thing. It's also a psychological thing. It really is.

Because, of course, if you still have it, you may not realize what a psychological dynamic it is, but when you lose it, it changes everything. If you lose it in marriage, there's no shame in it, but it still changes your whole perspective. If you lose it outside of marriage, there's a great deal of shame, and a great deal of loss.

And even if you are forgiven by God, which is the case if you repent, you will never be as innocent. You may be righteous inside God, but you'll never be as naive and innocent

and pure as you were before. At least, I doubt that you will.

I've never seen it to happen. There are some cases where that may, by the grace of God, even that state of mind may be able to be restored. But you can't count on it.

There are irretrievable losses through sin. And a person who's truly repentant doesn't come back with demands in hand, saying, okay, I'm meeting the conditions, I'm repenting, now let's have things back the way they were. No, you come back with humility, acknowledging that you have lost every right to be trusted, to be loved, to be accepted, to be in any sense privileged by your sin.

Anything you get back is just grace. It's just the grace of God. And unless you're thinking that way about your sin, still self-centered and not God-centered, not realizing what sin really is like inside of God.

Okay, let's finish this up real quick in about a few minutes. So the father sees the son coming in the distance, runs out, embraces him. The fact that the father ran out and met him rather than sitting on the porch with his arms folded, saying, well, let's see if he comes all the way home or not.

The fact that he sees the first motions of repentance, the first motions of a return of the part of the son inspires the father to go out and do everything he can to welcome him and to make up the gap that remained between them. God certainly honors even the weakest, motions of repentance, if they're genuine, and will assist the person who's seeking to repent. Repentance is granted, the Bible says, by God.

It's a gift. It's not a gift that he just gives out arbitrarily. It's an enablement that he provides.

It's a grace that he provides to those who show inclination for it, who make some kind of response to his initial conviction, and therefore, they show some inclination to return. God will help them. He'll run out to meet them and to help them do so.

Now, the son began to make his speech. He didn't quite get it finished. The part about, make me one of your hired servants, he never got around to because his father interrupted him.

He said, nonsense. You're my son. You were dead.

You're now alive. That's how I look at it. You were lost.

Now you're found. Let's stop talking about no longer my son. And so he put his own robe and ring, it would appear on him, and killed a fatted cow.

Killing a fatted calf was something that even rich families didn't do every day. A calf makes a rather large meal. It was much more common for an evening's meal to kill a

lamb or a kid, you know, a much smaller beast.

A goat kid, I mean, Matt. But a calf is too large to feed even a large household. So it looks as if it's a little bit like the previous parables where the father is inviting all the neighbors in.

It's not just that they're going to have a meal and say all is well. He's having a feast for the whole village. Now this is very humble on the part of the father.

First of all, because we see the father running out to meet his son. One thing I learned about peasant culture is older men never run. A man's dignity is associated with the way he walks in Middle Eastern culture.

And an old man never shows himself to be so undignified as to run anywhere. He walks in a respectable and stately manner. But the father here runs out to meet his son, casting all dignity to the wind, caring nothing about how the town's going to talk when they talk about how he ran like this.

And he weeps publicly and he kisses his son. And then he throws a public feast instead of saying, OK, son, you know, you've caused me a lot of embarrassment, but let's sneak in the back door here and we will just try to break it on the village gently here that you come back. We'll make up some story that you really didn't do such a bad thing after all.

Instead, he just makes a public announcement. His son is back. He shamelessly receives him, invites all the neighbors over to come and have a feast, kills a calf for it.

And this is the humility of God that Jesus is telling us about. Is God really humble? He is. He's very humble to associate with people like ourselves.

And he does so shamelessly, just like Jesus shamelessly associated with the tax collectors and sinners. You've seen him. You've seen the father.

Now, the older son's reaction is all that remains to be talked about here. The older son is a character that has no counterpart in the other two parables. The lost coin, the lost sheep, there isn't an older son or the counterpart to him in that.

But he does have a counterpart in the circumstance that called forth these parables, and that is in the Pharisees. He's basically saying the son protests to God or to Jesus that he is receiving this sinful party back. And the father comes out to the son.

The son won't go into the feast. So the father again goes out to him, again, humbling himself rather than the father standing there and saying, listen, if my older son doesn't come in here, he's in defiance of me. And I like I like to communicate him from the family.

I'll disown him. Which I mean, now his older son was insulting the father equally to what

his younger son had done. When the father says, come on in and the son says, I won't come in and rebellious to stand outside.

It was you can see this father had two trouble, troublesome sons, two rebellious sons, but one pretended at obedience. But instead of saying, OK, I disown you, son, because you're not coming into my face when I told you to. Now you're embarrassing me in front of the neighbors.

The father again, humbles himself, comes out to his rebellious older son. And says, son, what's the matter? Come on in. And the son says, you never did anything like this for me and my friends.

You never even gave us so much as a goat kid to share with my friends. And here I've never disobeyed any of your commandments. Now, the answer was, in verse 31, son, you are always with me and all that I have is yours.

There was nothing left of the inheritance but what belonged to the older son. The younger son squandered all of his. All the rest of the property belonged to the older son.

Or at least on paper, it was to be his. The younger son had nothing to inherit. He'd already taken his share and lost it.

Everything that's left is yours. You got plenty of lambs and kids if you want. And who said I would have ever objected to you using them in this way? The older son has misjudged his father too.

He hasn't realized yet that the father's withheld nothing from him. And it is the son himself who withholds such things from himself. He apparently did not think his father would approve of him having a feast.

His father's words indicate you could have done anything you wanted. Everything I have is yours. Why haven't you had these feasts? You know, why? Because the older son wasn't the type to feast.

That is, to party. There wasn't a jovial bone in his body. He was a bitter, caustic, religious, self-righteous person who believed that parties were out of character with what his father would approve of.

And therefore, though he had every opportunity to rejoice any day of his life with his friends, he had never done so because his father, he thought, would not approve. And his father says, boy, have you misjudged me. There are two wasteful sons here.

This son has wasted all the time he'd spent with his father. He'd never gotten to know him. He'd never come to realize where his father's heart was, just like the Pharisees, who had devoted so much of their lives to religion and to study of religion and to the attempt

to practice religion, but they'd never met God.

They'd never come to know where his heart was or what mattered to him. And so, at the end, it says, it was right that we should make Mary and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again and was lost and is found. We do not read whether the older brother came in.

Why? Because this leaves the situation exactly where Jesus and his opponents stood. Jesus was making that appeal to the Pharisees at that very moment, just as the father did to the older son. What would their decision be? Well, that's an open question.

That's up to them. The older son is not represented as saying yea or nay, of repenting or becoming more aloof and more alienated from his father, but those were obviously the two options open to him and those were the two options Jesus was leaving open to the Pharisees. And that's how the chapter ends.

Now, the next chapter, which we'll take next time, has three additional parables. They also have sort of a common theme, but we'll talk about that next time. We're done and we have no further time today.