

# OpenTheo

## Parables of Lost Things (Part 1)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses three parables from Luke 15 that all share a common theme of lost things being found. The parables emphasize God's concern for the lost and the joy and celebration that comes when they are found. Although there are theological debates about the decision points in the parables, Gregg highlights the importance of repentance and obedience in the stories. Overall, the parables teach about the nature of sin and the immense value of redemption in the eyes of God.

### **Transcript**

In this session, we're going to take three parables that occur in Luke 15. All three make the same point. From time to time, there are chapters like this which have a number of parables, in fact, which are almost entirely taken up with a series of parables, which in some cases make the same point or a similar point, and they're linked just one right after another.

Matthew 13, of course, is like that to a major extent. Not the entire chapter, but most of it is occupied with a series of parables that are all said to be parables of the kingdom of God. Matthew 25 is a little like that, too.

It has three parables. The parable of the ten virgins, the parable of the talents, and the parable of the sheep and the goats, all of which have something to do with being prepared for the second coming of Christ or for the day of reckoning when he returns. In Luke 15, we have three parables, again, which all focus the same direction.

Some of them have slightly different spin that they put on the thought, but they're still all three told in rapid succession to make a single point. That point is introduced in the opening verse, Luke 15, verse 1. Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to him to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

So he spoke this parable to them, saying, 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 was lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders,

rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have lost my sheep which was found. 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.

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? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the peace which I lost. Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Then he said, A certain man had two sons.

The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me. So he divided them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

Prodigal means wasteful. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. 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. I will arise and go to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Make me like one of your hired servants. 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. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

But the father said to his servants, Bring the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, and bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found, and they began to be merry.

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

But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. 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. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood of harlot, you killed the fatted calf for him. And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.

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. Okay, these three parables all obviously have the same point, and that is that God rejoices over lost persons who have been found. And this is illustrated three ways.

In the first parable, the lost person is described like a sheep that has wandered off, and the shepherd goes after him. When he gets him, he is happy to find him and rejoices. The second, the sinner is like a coin that has been lost by a woman of her house, and she goes looking for it, and she rejoices when she finds it.

The third is obviously a much more extensive parable with further detail, and the lesson is extended beyond the original point of the two previous parables. In the third parable, the sinner is a human, and he is lost by his own rebellion, but he comes back on his own volition as well, and is received, and his father rejoices. But the story doesn't end there in this case.

In this case, there is also the reaction of another son, a negative reaction. He is not pleased at all to see the son who has returned restored and forgiven. He is, in fact, upset with his father over showing such delight in this matter.

Now that is an added feature to the third story that isn't found in the first two, and it's very pointed toward the Pharisees themselves who are criticizing Jesus for partying, as it were, with repentant sinners. Now, in verse one, it says, It doesn't say in so many words that they were repentant of being tax collectors and sinners. However, the parables Jesus told, which were supposed to be relevant to the situation, indicated that he regarded them as repentant, and that's why he was celebrating.

That's why he was enjoying their company and eating with them and so forth. He obviously considered that they were like the sheep who had been returned, the coin that had been found, and the prodigal son who had repented and come back home. So, we are to deduce, although we're not told in so many words, according to Jesus' own assessment of it in the parables he told, that these tax collectors and sinners grew near to Christ, not only geographically, not only coming close enough so they could hear his voice, but they grew near to him in their hearts also by repenting of their sins.

And, of course, Jesus never showed any sensitivity about people's past if they were repentant. I think also that the woman who was taken in adultery in John chapter 8, we would have to assume, though we're not told, that she was also repentant, because Jesus says to her, I don't condemn you, but don't sin anymore either. We know that the

Bible requires repentance of sinners, and while we're not told outright that that woman in John 8 had repented of her sins, Jesus' reaction to her suggests that he considered that she was repentant.

So, it should not be thought that Jesus was lax about sin, or that Jesus was lenient about holiness. He was not. He was very forgiving, however, when people repented.

You remember that when Jesus was, on another occasion, criticized on this very same point, in Matthew chapter 9, Jesus, after he called Levi, the publican, Matthew, he called him to be a disciple, and that night, apparently, Matthew invited all of his friends, his tax collectors and sinner friends, to come to dinner at his house. And there was a feast. Jesus attended.

Once again, Jesus, or I shouldn't say once again, this was probably the first time, and now we're reading it a second, Jesus was criticized for hanging out with that kind of company. But Jesus said that he had not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance, he said. He didn't just leave it off, I have come to call sinners, but he has come to call sinners to repentance.

That is missing from some of the manuscripts of Matthew, but the parallel in Mark contains it in all manuscripts, and therefore we know that it's authentic. So, Jesus did not mind associating with sinners to call them to repentance. A lot of times, people who are actually backslidden in heart, and are out of fellowship, they don't go to church anymore, but they do hang out with their old crowd in all the wrong places.

I've heard them say, well, you know, Jesus hung out with sinners and tax collectors, as if there's some parallel between Jesus and themselves in this situation. I'm talking about people who have actually really fallen away from the Lord, and are living in compromise and in bad company. And, of course, the obvious difference is that Jesus was never compromised in his own holiness.

If sinners could tolerate his presence, he could tolerate theirs, especially if his presence had any redemptive value in calling them to repentance. That's what he had come to do. He said those who are well are not the ones who need a physician, but those who are sick.

Once again, the illustration, that's in Matthew chapter 9, that illustration of a physician, and people who are sick, implies that he wasn't there just to hang out with the sick people, he was there to cure them. He was not there just to enjoy the company of sinners, but he was there to call them to repentance, and to accept them back into the Father's house. Now, the Pharisees had no room for this.

First of all, of course, the Jewish system required that sin be atoned for through sacrifice. We do not read anywhere that these tax collectors and sinners had gone to the temple

and done all the things required in the eyes of the Pharisees. Nor are we to believe necessarily that the Pharisees would be accepting of these people, even if they had offered such sacrifices.

The Pharisees, no doubt, like most religious hypocrites, took pride in thinking themselves better than others and above certain associations. And therefore, a person's scandalous past, even if they've jumped through the hoops of offering the right sacrifices and so forth at the temple, probably would have been held against them. And it's unlikely, very unlikely, that the Pharisees would have ever hung out with people who had such a checkered past as this group of people.

But Jesus was certainly aware that he was liable to this criticism. He had been criticized like this before, but he seemed to show no interest in whether people were critical of him on these points. He just continued to do the right thing.

And he certainly would not exclude repentant sinners. The Apostle Paul ran into conflict with Peter about this very issue once over the table fellowship Paul was having, and up to a certain point so was Peter, with Gentiles who were uncircumcised. Now these, like the ones that Jesus was hanging out with, were repentant Gentiles, but they had not jumped through the Jewish hoops of getting circumcised and doing the temple things to do to atone for their sins.

They simply were repentant and were accepted on that basis. And the Apostle Paul, who had once been a strict Pharisee himself, but had reformed, he was willing to associate with them. Peter, surprisingly, is the one who wasn't.

Now of course Peter was at first, but it was the presence of Phariseic kinds of Jews from the church in Jerusalem that intimidated Peter and caused him to withdraw, and Peter received a strong rebuke for his hypocrisy from Paul. All of that, of course, is found in Galatians chapter 2. Paul, in that story, of course, is more like Jesus than Peter was. Peter was acting more like a Pharisee.

But we see again, there is that danger of us being overly concerned about a person's past. Perhaps not so much because we hold their past against them, but because we're concerned about guilt by association. We know that such people have maybe a scandalous reputation, and that by associating with them and receiving them, regardless of whether they're repentant or not, and regardless of their reputation, that we may alienate some good feelings that we formerly enjoyed from respectable people.

But that is, of course, insofar as that is done, that's religious and pharisaical. Jesus did not isolate himself from any sinners who had repented. And so he rebuked them with these parables.

Now, the first parable is about a shepherd and sheep. Jesus said this kind of thing on

other occasions as well. In Matthew 18, verses 12 through 14, there's something like this parable there, uttered by Jesus to his disciples on another occasion, in the relationships discourse that Matthew has in that chapter, Matthew 18.

But let's read this parable. 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. And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

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. I say to you that likewise there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, excuse me, more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. Now, in the parable, the ninety-nine whom he leaves in the wilderness to go after the one, that ninety-nine represents people who need no repentance, people who have their act together.

Now, we shouldn't necessarily think that Jesus is categorizing the Pharisees in this group, that they need no repentance. However, the Pharisees certainly regarded themselves to be in that group, and I think that that's where the sting of this lay. Jesus was perhaps, with a certain amount of irony, referring to them in terms that they viewed themselves, and they were, so they may have thought, ninety-nine who needed no repentance, ninety-nine who were where they ought to be, doing the right thing.

But even if that's how they regarded themselves, they should not think it strange that the shepherds should go after the ones who are strayed, like these tax collectors and sinners. Now, this parable has presented such powerful images in church history to the imagination of people, that there are actually people I've met who have asked what Jesus' profession was, besides being the Messiah, you know, what Jesus did for a living. They think he was a shepherd.

Many people have seen the pictures of Jesus with a little lamb on his shoulders, just like it says here, he puts it on his shoulders, and forgetting that the Bible says he was a carpenter, many people have thought of him as a shepherd. Of course, many of God's great leaders were shepherds, even before they became leaders in other senses. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds of sheep.

Moses was a shepherd for forty years before he became a shepherd of God's flock. David was a shepherd throughout his youth before he became a shepherd of God's people. And while Jesus himself never really worked in that occupation, he did say in John chapter 10 that he was the good shepherd of the sheep, and that he did, like any good shepherd would, lay down his life for the sheep.

In other words, the sheep's priority, and in this case he means people, was the shepherd's concern and the sheep's well-being. So if one wandered off, of course the

shepherd would go after it. Now, one thing I would say is a lesson we can learn from this story, especially what verse 4 communicates to us, is that a good shepherd is able to make a distinction between the more and the less needy of supervision in his flock.

You've heard me say this, it may be before, but people often forget it. I was in a conversation with a pastor at one time who was pretty strongly into shepherding the church and making disciples, he felt, of his flock. And his idea of shepherding and making disciples was for the church to have a program and then make everybody participate equally.

So they set up a home fellowship group in their church. That is, a number of home fellowships. And they basically required, they didn't have much teeth in it, but they verbally insisted that everyone in the church should be in one of these home groups.

And so, I was in the church, so I sought to comply. I went to one of the home groups and there were about four people in it, and eventually it dwindled down to two, and eventually it just stopped existing, so we went and found another home group, and it eventually dwindled down to nothing. And then we went to a third home group.

This one we really enjoyed, but the people who ran it ended up going on the mission field a few months after we got in it, so it disappeared. It was in their home and they were the leaders. And so, you know, we just kind of thought, well, you know, why are we even going to these home groups? I mean, they're a midweek sort of thing, we're getting maxed out on fellowship at other times of the week, why should we even go to these groups? So I went to the pastor and I said, well, you know, with all due respect, I think home groups are a nice deal, but they're not really working out to be anything our family needs, and I hope you don't mind if we stop looking for one.

We've been through three of them in rapid succession, and they haven't really been stable, or they haven't ministered anything into our lives, and they haven't really been a principal forum for ministry for us either, so there doesn't seem to be any benefit in participating in this. And the pastor said, but if you don't go to home groups, then perhaps others will feel they don't have to go to home groups who do need it. And I said, well, I don't know that it's right to standardize the demand on the sheep when not everyone has the same needs.

And he said to me, well, how do you disciple people then? And I said, well, you know, one principle I think of discipleship that Jesus gives in this parable here, but I appeal to this particular verse, Luke 15, verse 4, about shepherding is that a good shepherd knows the difference between high maintenance sheep and low maintenance sheep. High maintenance people are people who need a lot of attention, a lot of input, who are relatively immature and unstable, and if left to themselves without much supervision, are likely to wander off into the wrong places and do the wrong kinds of things. Those are high maintenance people.

You need to give them a lot of attention. On the other hand, there are, in every church I've ever been in, a number of what we call low maintenance people. By the way, a pastor should rejoice if most of his people are low maintenance because it only takes a few high maintenance people to absorb all the time a pastor has.

He should be very happy if he's got a church full of low maintenance people. Low maintenance people are people who are self-started, they've got a conscience, they live in the fear of God, they don't need to be prodded, they don't have to be told how to provide for themselves sufficient spiritual input, they do it on their own, and they go out and establish works on their own and lead them and so forth. This kind of person should be a pastor's dream, unless the pastor sees himself as the only intelligent person in the church and the only one who has a clue of what God wants the church to do or what kind of ministries ought to be done in the church.

And I said, you know, in this parable Jesus said there were, in a flock there might be 99 low maintenance sheep. And the shepherd concentrates his efforts in discipling the 1%, who are very high maintenance. Now in a modern church there may be more than 1% of the people that are high maintenance people.

And this is because we allow people in the church who aren't really converted. It takes a lot of attention to keep an unconverted person acting like a Christian. And when you fill the churches up, you fill the pews up with people who have never really had a heart for God in the first place, and then you try to standardize their behavior and try to regiment it and try to make sure that they're pretending to be Christians nicely, you know, you've got a lot of work on your hands.

It's like having, you know, 80% of your sheep wandering off in different directions and one shepherd running around trying to catch them all and bring them back. I suppose in the early church, where there was probably, you know, a little bit more of a biblical gospel preached and where people were probably more often than not converted before they were allowed into the church as members, that most of those people, let's just put it this way, there were no doubt troublesome Christians. There were probably Christians with serious problems in their background or in their presence, where the pastor or the elders had to concentrate a lot of their counseling efforts and so forth.

But the majority of real Christians don't need intensive shepherding from people. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11, the head of every man is Christ. Christ is the shepherd of most of us.

That doesn't mean there's no place for pastor elders to shepherd the flock. There is, but those pastors economize best on their time. If they can discern who in the flock needs attention and what kind they need, and who does not need special attention.

And, you know, the inability to make a distinction in his mind between 99 low-



maintenance sheep on the one hand and one high-maintenance sheep is going to have the pastor trying to spend an equal amount of time standardizing and keeping everyone involved to an equal extent in all the same kinds of activities when that's irrelevant to the lives of many of them. And unnecessary use of his time. And then the really high-maintenance sheep don't get enough time because the pastor spends so much of his time on the people who don't need it.

Anyway, that was my suggestion to him. He seemed to see some validity in it, though after I left the church he went back to his old ways of thinking. But anyway, I think Jesus gives us here an obvious model for leadership, an obvious model for shepherding.

And that is the sheep, of course, are accountable. But to whom? Well, sheep that behave themselves are accountable to God in their conscience and don't mind being accountable to everybody. I mean, it doesn't take some intensive shepherding on the part of a single man, an individual, for people who are already obeying God as a regular habit.

But accountability, the way I would approve of it in the church, and of course you know that I have some ideas out of the ordinary on the whole subject of accountability, but the kind of accountability I think the Bible approves of is that the leaders of the church recognize when somebody in the church is in sin or when somebody in the church is stumbling and falling or discouraged or when somebody in the church is drifting off into false doctrine and error. Now those are situations the pastor or elders should go after because those people are on the brink of destruction. But the parties who are self-accountable to God, that is, on their own, they care what God thinks.

They live their lives in the fear of God as accountable before Him in their conscience. Those people aren't going to need an awful lot of intrusive pastoring in their lives, I wouldn't think. This is my observation.

I know a lot of people who are not ministers who are as well-behaved as ministers are. In fact, I know some people who aren't ministers who are better behaved than some ministers are. And to suggest that they and their daily behavior should be accountable to the minister is a strange doctrine to me.

I just don't find it in Scripture. Jesus describes the shepherd's activities as being going after the wandering sheep, the sheep that's got serious problems, that's endangering himself by his misbehavior. And in doing so, that shepherd cannot at the same time supervise the 99 that he must leave to do it.

But they're okay. They know where to be. They stick around.

They're not wanderers. And he can afford to go after the ones that are in trouble. That's what Jesus said he was doing.

Now the fact of the matter is, of course, and this is where we have to appreciate a bit of irony in Jesus' statement about those who need no repentance, everybody was a wandering sheep when Jesus showed up. I mean, the ones he called, there just weren't any Christians yet. You know, there were Jews.

Some of them, I shouldn't say they were all wandering, because some of the Jews, there were faithful in it that were trying to fill the line with God, but they all did need to repent, of course. The irony is in his reference to the 99 who don't need any repentance as being the way the Pharisees viewed themselves. But anyway, here we have one of the ways that he illustrates that it is God's concern to go after the lost.

And that once he has found someone who is lost, it makes God happy. And not only does it make him happy, but he calls upon all his friends to rejoice with him. It says in verse 6, when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I found my sheep which was lost.

What Jesus is saying is to the Pharisees, if you are God's friends, then you should be heeding his call to rejoice with him. These sheep have been brought home from their wandering. You should think the shepherd would be pleased about that.

And if you are any friend of his, you would be happy for him and for them, if they are critical and resentful. Well, anyway, that's his point. Now he says in verse 7, and he says it again in verse 10, that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance.

The suggestion is that God has friends, at least in heaven, who rejoice with him. There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels, it says in verse 10. The angels of God over one sinner who repents.

So, we can see that heaven is not grumpy or reluctant to accept repentant sinners. The angels party every day because of it. I mean, we are talking parties.

In the third parable, the older son draws near and he hears the music and the dancing going on. This is a picture of the kingdom of God. Sinners coming home to God and God throwing a party.

Anthony Campolo has a book out called *The Kingdom of God is a Party*. I haven't read it. And I think he chose the title to shock people.

He is kind of that way. But it's really right. I mean, Jesus used the party idea to illustrate the kingdom of God.

But not, of course, the kind of partying that we usually think of among sinners. But celebration. It's an occasion for celebration and having fun.

Something the Pharisees never allowed themselves to do, apparently. The second parable, we switch the image from a shepherd, which is a male, to a woman. And the last item is no longer a sheep, but a coin.

Okay. 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? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors, just like the shepherd did, together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the peace which I lost. Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Again, we have the same basic lesson at the end of the story. The details are changed, possibly significantly. The rejoicing of this woman over a coin that was lost and then found may seem a bit, I don't know, excessive or whatever.

I mean, so what if she finds a coin? Well, remember, she only had ten. If these coins represent her life savings, and she only has ten, and she loses ten percent, well, that's going to be quite valuable to her, and she'll be quite relieved when she relocates it. There are some who have said, in fact, most commentators, I think, feel, that this isn't talking about coins such as are used in spending in the marketplace, but this is a reference to a bridal headdress that was common, I guess, in those days for women to wear at their wedding, which would have little silver discs or coins hung around across the forehead on a chain.

And that this was, this is the coins that are referred to here. Whether that's the case or not, I can't say. But this would mean, of course, that if she lost one of these coins, the headdress would be marred.

It would have a missing, a gap there. And if this is something that she was looking forward to using at her wedding, or passing on to her daughter at her wedding, or even just something that had sentimental value to her because she looked back to her wedding, we're not told, of course, what the marital status of this woman was. But in any case, the recovery of the missing part of the headdress would be an occasion of relief and rejoicing.

So that's, you know, that's one suggestion, too. The only point here is that Jesus assumes his listeners will appreciate the fact that a woman in such a circumstance, and they would understand better than we do exactly what the social implications were of the loss of one of these ten coins, that a person in that circumstance would not only be pleased, but would be pleased enough to invite all her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her. So that the tragedy of having lost one of these coins, at least from her perspective, was great enough to alert the whole town about, or the whole neighborhood about.

And the finding of it also is something for her to let them know about. So it's a major

thing. Now, in these two parables, that of the sheep and that of the coin, lessons have sometimes been sought by persons with a particular agenda of a Calvinistic or Arminian sort.

For example, it is pointed out that the sheep is collected by the shepherd without the sheep making any effort to come back himself. The sheep can only wander away. It requires the shepherd to go completely after the sheep, and on his own strength to recover the sheep, put it on his shoulders and forcibly bring it back.

Likewise, the lost coin has absolutely no power in itself to help itself be found. It simply must wait for the ingenuity and the diligence of the one seeking the coin to find it, or else it will remain lost. In other words, all the finding of the lost item in these two parables is done by the party who lost them, the shepherd or the woman.

The sheep and the coin have done nothing, contributed nothing to their having been found. And this fits well into the Calvinist way of thinking that a person who is lost and unregenerate cannot contribute anything at all to their recovery, to their conversion, that they are dead in trespasses and sin. They are without any ability to make any motions toward God whatsoever.

They must just wait for God to initiate, for God to unconditionally choose them and to give them the faith and give them the decision to believe, and to work in them to will and to do them good pleasure, and to irresistibly draw them as this lamb was irresistibly carried home, or the coin was irresistibly recovered by the one who found it. Now, you know, the issue of whether the Calvinists have right doctrine or not on this particular point will be decided differently by different parties, depending on their grasp of the total biblical material on the subject. But let me just say this.

I don't think that these parables contribute anything to that discussion. If they do, then the third one must also. And in the third one, it was the boy himself who decided to come home.

The father wanted him to, and when the father saw him in the distance, his father ran out to meet him. But the boy had on his own come to himself, the expression is, and figured things out, that things were not good for him where he was and it would be better if he returned to his father. And he made the first start to his father, and then his father came running out to meet him halfway.

Now, if we're going to insist that all the details of these stories are pressed into exact theological parallels and conversions, then we are going to have to have a mixed picture here, because on the one hand, the sheep and the coin had no power to recover themselves, but the boy had, it was entirely, in that story, it was entirely his decision. There was no influence coming from his father, as far as we know, no letters of, you know, begging him to come home or anything like that. He just found himself in a very

undesirable situation.

He got smart, he said, boy, am I stupid to be where I am, I'd be a lot smarter to go home. And he went home, and he was received. So, if we're going to try to press those kinds of details in the first two parables, it would be reasonable and consistent to press the same kind of details in the second.

I don't think you can, because you get mixed messages there. The first two parables would seem to support a Calvinist idea, but the last one would seem to support an Arminian idea, the idea that man has to make his own decisions about this. God will meet him, God will help him, but the man has to decide for himself.

So, I guess what I'm saying is the decision on these points of Calvinist versus Arminian doctrines must be decided on something other than these parables. These parables are not decisive at all in deciding that kind of issue, and the only reason I bring it up is because some people speak as if they are. All right.

Okay, we come next to the story of the prodigal. We call this the story of the prodigal son, although most people who use that expression, almost everybody has heard of the prodigal son, but most Americans have no idea what the word prodigal means. I think most would assume it means runaway or evil or sinful or something like that.

The word prodigal, as I mentioned reading the story, it just means nothing more than wasteful. However, wastefulness is a sin, and wastefulness is something for which a person must repent if he has done it. You might remember some of the parables Jesus taught about stewardship.

In one case, a master gave his steward, his servant, ten talents, five talents and one talent, respectively, to invest and use on his behalf and to increase it for the master's benefit. Two of them did so, but one of them just hid his talent in the ground and had nothing to show for it. Now, while he was able to give back his master what was originally given to him when his master returned, he had wasted all opportunity to increase it for his master.

And he was therefore consigned to the place where there is outer darkness and we think of gnashing of teeth, which means it was a rather severe offense that he committed against his master. Wastefulness is not a small matter. Even when Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish, which one could argue, you know, hey, he fed a multitude with free food, really.

I mean, there's no cost to this. Just a boy's small lunch, which no doubt the boy got back as much food as he contributed, as well as everybody else. You might say, well, you know, this food was free, at God's bounty.

And it was. However, after it all, Jesus said to his disciples, gather up all the fragments,

but nothing of it be wasted. Which is interesting.

They apparently kept the fragments for a day or two until they were too rotten to eat for their daily bread and for a few days thereafter. It was not to be discarded. If God has given you something of some potential value, it is expected that you will use it for his glory.

He doesn't give you things, even if they come to you freely and easily. He doesn't give you things to waste. He gives you things as a stewardship.

And so this boy's flagrant wastefulness of his father's goods, of his father's inheritance, is his great sin here. Of course, there is mention later on of his devouring his livelihood with harlots in verse 30. However, whether the boy really did spend any time with harlots or not, we don't know.

This is his older brother's resentful remark about him. And there is no evidence in the story that his brother had received any particular information about his brother while he was gone. That there had been any communication between them, and therefore that the younger son had wasted his living with harlots, is possibly just an assumption on the part of the older brother.

In fact, there is a good chance it reflects the older brother's own heart and what he would do if he had that much money and went off out from under his father's nose. You know, a lot of times when people accuse other people of, especially when they have no evidence that such is the case, you can tell by their accusations more about themselves than about the person they are accusing. You can tell that if they are assuming that so and so would do such and such a thing, that perhaps they, the accuser, would do such and such a thing in the same circumstances.

And therefore, I guess we could say that there is really nothing in this about the sinfulness of the boy except for his wastefulness. And therefore, Jesus portrays a picture of the sinner who returns to God as one who has wasted something, wasted a great deal. He has wasted the earlier years of his life before he has repented.

Now, since God owns us, since God made us, since God brought each of us into the world, every moment of our lives since they were born belonged to Him, and since it has belonged to Him, He had a claim on how our time was used. Unfortunately, we can all look back on the time before our conversion and say, well, those were wasted years with reference to pursuing the kingdom of God or any eternal good, and some of the wastes were more heinous than others, I mean, depending on how we wasted it. If a person didn't go out and do atrocities during his pre-conversion days, he was still wasteful.

The Pharisees themselves were wasteful in this particular respect, although that wasn't the point that he was making in the parable. But the idea is that he presents in the

parable the great sin of this young man is his wastefulness. And that's why we call him prodigal, the prodigal son, because he's wasteful.

Now, it's important that we catch a hold of this thought, because some of us never did do anything very scandalous in our past. We never hung out with the worst types of people. We never joined an outlaw motorcycle gang.

We never raped old ladies or robbed banks or mainlined crack or whatever. Most of us have not done those kind of things. Perhaps some here have done some of those things, but probably not too much.

We're a pretty lily-white bunch here, I'm afraid. But probably not as much as I think, if I knew more. But be that as it may, when people have not done scandalous things, they often do not think that they have that much need of repentance.

Or if they acknowledge that they've been imperfect and should repent of their imperfection, they often don't realize how grievous that imperfection was, because they don't realize that every moment wasted, that could have been a moment of worshiping God, of living to please God, of influencing others for God, but every moment that was instead spent on pursuing your own selfish pleasures and selfish happiness and ambitions and so forth, is eternally lost. It's a moment you'll never recover. And so it's a wasteful thing.

Like this son went out and wasted his father's inheritance. He could never get it back. He couldn't give it back to his father again.

And he could never have it again. He lost it. It was gone.

It wasn't coming back. And that's true of every moment that we spend. One way or another, it doesn't ever come back.

And every moment that we spend doing anything other than what is the pleasure of God for us to do is wasted and lost forever and is a crime and a theft against God. And so it doesn't matter that we did or didn't do heinous crimes. It's heinous crime enough to rob God of his entitled use of our time for his kingdom's advancement.

Okay, let's have a look at this parable verse by verse. In verse 11, Jesus said, A certain man had two sons. There's another parable that starts out that way.

I think it's in Matthew chapter 20, but I wouldn't swear by it. Matthew tells us not to swear. I think it's in chapter 20 of Matthew.

Jesus says there was a certain man who had two sons. But the story's different. But it has a similar meaning to this one.

It's much shorter. Let me see. I might as well take a look at it.

I didn't intend to, but now that I've drawn this much attention to it, I might as well take a look at it. Let me see here. I think it's not 20.

It's 21, I think. That's right. My eyes fell right upon it as soon as you said that.

Thank you. Matthew 21, 28. Okay.

Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and the leaders. You're ahead of me by a split second. He says, But what do you think? A man had two sons.

And he came to the first and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not. But afterward he regretted it and went.

He repented. Then he came to the second and said likewise, Go work in my vineyard. And he answered and said, I go, sir.

But he never went. Which of the two did the will of his father? And they said to him, The first. Jesus said to them, Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.

Now, the lesson of this story is just as obvious as that of the prodigal son. God is the father in both cases. And in both cases, he has two kinds of siblings, sons that are siblings to each other.

But they are siblings only biologically. In spirit, they are worlds apart. The one is pretending to be loyal to the father.

When the father says to do something, he pretends that he's loyally going to go out and do it. Sure, I'll do what you say, dad. But never really gets around to doing what the father ever says to do.

This represents the Pharisees. They were Jews. They were therefore, in a sense, God's children.

But they were not obedient. Yet, they pretended to be. That was the whole of their life, was to demonstrate how obedient to God they were.

And yet, while they were outwardly saying, I go, sir, I go. I'm doing what you want me to do. They never really did it.

They never loved their neighbors or self. They never did the things that God commanded. They never worked in the vineyard.

They never brought forth any fruit. They were like the older brother who said, I've never disobeyed any of your commandments, father. And his father said, Well, you're disobeying me right now.



Because I said to come into the feast, and you're not coming in. He didn't say it quite like that, but that was the point. The son protests that he is obedient.

But at the very moment he's making the protestation, he's not being obedient. That's what the Pharisees were characterized by. The other kind of son is the one who initially is rebellious.

The son who's told what to do by his father says, No. I'm going to do what I want to do instead of what you want me to do. That person represents the tax collectors and sinners.

It's also represented by the prodigal son in the story. And yet, in this parable in Matthew 21, 28 and following, the first son who was at first rebellious repents and eventually comes home and does what his father told him to do. And Jesus' point in Matthew 21 on this parable is, Is it better to get a late start at obeying God after a rebellious beginning, or is it better to pretend that you're going to do what God says and never do it? That's the point of both parables.

Both are parables of two sons. The one of the prodigal son is much better.