

The Story Of The Prodigal Son Luke 15

Introduction:

1. Often Jesus would tell stories to drive home a divine truth. Here in Luke 15, Jesus tells three stories about:
 - A lost sheep
 - A lost coin
 - A lost son
2. The last story is the well-known story of the prodigal son. Let's read some of this together.
3. Most Christians are familiar with Jesus' parables, but usually they fail to realize the reason behind the story. Jesus didn't tell stories just to entertain. They were to make a point. What is the context of this story? Look at verses 1 and 2.
4. The Pharisees were the religious leaders of Israel, and they didn't like these social outcasts coming to Jesus and having their lives changed. Jesus' fame was beginning to spread, and it was intimidating the Pharisees.
5. They had an exclusive religious circle that was being threatened. People haven't changed in 2,000 years.

Cliques – An age-old problem!

1. One of the easiest things for a local church to do is to lose sight of why we exist. We can allow ourselves to forget what the purpose and mission of Jesus Christ was. Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15
2. So many churches become exclusive communities that exist for themselves. Ever heard of the word "clique" before? It is defined as "a narrow exclusive circle or group of persons." Kids and teens are bad about this; but so are adults!
3. I was trying to think of a Bible passage or Bible example of a clique.
 - The thought-provoking passage of James 2:1-4 came to mind. One person fit in this guy's clique, but the other one didn't; therefore, he ostracized him.
 - **A biblical example:** Did you know there were cliques in Jesus' day? The Pharisees and Scribes had developed their own religious clique. They had their own self-made set of religious rules that they thought made them superior to others. Look at how cliquish they were. Luke 15:1-2.
4. Do you see it? Jesus didn't fit into their clique. Jesus welcomed into His circle outsiders and outcasts. He was their friend. He had compassion on them. The Pharisees condemned Him for this. Compare the two different mindsets:
 - Jesus – I am come to seek and to save that which is lost.
 - Pharisees – We are here to keep our religious machine running without disturbance. Unless you fit in perfectly with our religious way of doing things, you are not welcome. They were a clique.

Religious Cliques – It’s all about us!

1. Just as people can become self-absorbed, self-consumed, and cliquish, so can churches. **Illustration:** A cartoon of signs everywhere on church property.
 - From the programming, to the budget, to the use of facilities, to the attitude towards guests, it all speaks of one guiding principle – “We are a church for us; we exist for us; we are the central focus; it is all about us!”
 - It is all about us, our group, our clique, our preferences, our traditions, our church community that we have created, and we aren’t going to allow any outsiders to come in here and mess it up. Of course, churches may not say this, but it is a prevailing attitude.
2. What is the opposite of this mentality? It is the attitude that we are a church that exists for others, which is Christ-like. Luke 14:12-13; Matthew 15:29-30; Philippians 2:4-8

The Prodigal’s Return – Breaking up the clique!

1. In the context of Luke 15, concerning the problem of the Pharisees’ religious clique, Jesus told these three parables.
2. This story had profound significance for the people of Israel – the people who Christ was ministering to and had come to save.
 - Israel had wandered far away from God. God had held their hand through the wilderness (like a father would his son), led them into Canaan land, and blessed them abundantly.
 - They had taken the blessings of God and squandered them. Like the prodigal, they said, “We will take our inheritance and do what we want with it.”
 - What was the result? They were now captives under the hands of the wicked Roman Empire (they were wallowing in the hog pen).
3. Do you see the correlation? This was Christ’s call to Israel – open your eyes to see your true condition (like the prodigal); repent and come home. *“I am come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* **Luke 19:10**
4. The leadership of Israel should have been the first to recognize Christ as the Messiah; instead they rejected Him. They didn’t want anybody coming in and messing up what they established. Does this sound familiar? How about the older brother? He thought he was better than his younger brother and didn’t want him coming in and rocking the boat.
5. But the father was absolutely thrilled and welcomed him in.
6. Here is the question. Should the attitude of the church today be the same as the father of the prodigal or the brother of the prodigal?
7. Obviously, we know the correct answer, but many times I am afraid we act like the brother of the prodigal. You may be wondering what I mean by that.
8. Let’s contrast the two:
 - When the sinful son returned home, what did the father do? He embraced him, welcomed him, loved him, and threw a party to celebrate his homecoming (vs. 7 & 10).

- The older brother was angry at the father and wanted nothing to do with the celebration. Do you know what really bothered him? He had his own clique (himself, his dad, his friends), and now here comes little brother upsetting the apple cart. How dare he intrude into our little clique!
- This was a message to the Pharisees. Like the older brother, they were content with the way things were. They didn't want Jesus and his social outcasts coming in and messing things up.

A Philippians 2:4 church – “We are a church that exists for others!”

1. How does a church create a climate like that? How does a church create a climate that says that we are a Philippians 2:4 church that isn't about looking out for ourselves and our little clique, but we are about others.
2. It begins with our attitude. A church that exists for others has an attitude of profound hospitality and humility. But why? Because we have personally experienced the radically inclusive love of God, and we want others to experience it too. But how do we do this?
 - **First, we welcome those who are lost and without Jesus.**
 - Some people have faith in Jesus Christ, and some do not. But we have to understand that one of the functions of the church is to reach out to them for their sake and for their salvation. We are their lifeline. 1 Thessalonians 3:12
 - **Example:** Acts 19:10-12, 18-20 “You mean the church exists for people that are full of the devil and practice witchcraft? You're getting it!”
 - **Second, we welcome those who are saved, but left the local church.**
 - **Illustration:** John Mark
 - **Third, we welcome those who are deemed socially unacceptable.**
 - This is the reason why the parables were told at the beginning of this chapter (vs. 1). The socially unacceptable seemed to be quite acceptable to Jesus. He could see the image of God in them. He sought them, embraced them, healed and transformed them. A community who follows Jesus can do just the same.
 - Let's face it – a hallmark of Jesus' ministry was his frequent table fellowship with the kinds of people who most “good” people wouldn't think of breaking bread with.

In Conclusion:

1. Jesus said in one of these parables, if there is a lost sheep, you leave the 99 and go after him. If you have ten valuable coins and you lose one, you don't say, “Oh well, I still have nine, forget that one.” No, you seek after it. If you have two sons and one goes astray, you don't write him off and say, “Well, I still have another one.”

2. The point of these parables is that the heart of Christ is to reach out and rescue those in need, those who need love, those who need a friend, those who need faith, and those who need God.
3. When is the last time you reached out to somebody you didn't recognize at church? When is the last time you broke bread with somebody that isn't in your circle of friends? When is the last time you called a guest in your life group during the week just to check on him or her? When is the last time you asked a guest or visitor to sit by you in church because they didn't have anybody? When is the last time you prayed for somebody that most people hate?
4. This is the heart of Christ and this is what the story of the prodigal son is all about – getting out of our religious cliques and showing the love of Christ to others. Philippians 2:4 – may this be the heart of our church.