

Sermon Outline - Session 3

The Two Lost Sons



Text: Luke 15:11-32 NIV

Alternate Title: Give Me My Share

Introduction: The third of Jesus' three parables is the longest and most famous. It is a story about a family—a father, an older son, and a younger son. The story begins when the younger son comes to the father and says, "Give me my share of the estate." In ancient times, when the father died, the oldest son always got "a double portion" of what any other child got. If there are two sons, the older would get two-thirds of the estate and so the younger would get one-third. So the story opens with the younger son asking for his one-third share of the inheritance. Let's look at: 1) the meaning of the request, 2) the response to that request, and 3) what difference it makes for us.

1. The meaning of the request—verses 11-12.

- The younger son's request was stunning, because the inheritance, of course, was not divided up and distributed to the children until the father died.
 - As Kenneth Bailey writes: "In Middle Eastern culture, to ask for the inheritance while the Father is alive, is to wish him *dead*."¹
 - The request would therefore have been a disgrace to the family name, because of the younger son's extraordinary disrespect for his father. It would have also been a blow to the economic standing of the family, since the father would have to sell part of his estate in order to give him his share.
 - In short, this request ripped the family apart. It was a relational and economic act of violence against the family's integrity.
- Why would the younger son make such a request?
 - In his *Confessions*, Augustine gives us a theory of why we do what we do, and especially why we sin. He makes this startling observation: "A man has murdered another man—what was his motive? Either he desired his wife or his property or else he would steal to support himself; or else he was afraid of losing something to him; or else, having been injured, he was burning to be revenged."² Augustine goes on to say that even a murderer murders because he *loves* something. He loves romance or wealth or his reputation or something else too much, inordinately, more than God, and that is why he murders. Our hearts are distorted by "disordered loves." We love, rest our hearts in, and look to *things* to give us the joy and meaning that only the Lord can give.
 - The younger son may have lived with his father and may even have obeyed his father, but he didn't love his father. The thing he loved, ultimately, was his father's things, not his father. His heart was set on the wealth and on the comfort, freedom and status that wealth brings.

¹ Kenneth Bailey, *Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (Concordia, 1992), 112.

² *St. Augustine Confessions*, trans. by H. Chadwick, (Oxford, 1998), Book 2:5.

His father was just a means to an end. Now, however, his patience was over. He knew that the request would be like a knife in his father's heart, but he obviously didn't care.

- Here is a great irony, which we will return to later in our series.
 - The two sons look very different, on the surface. One runs off and lives a dissolute life, one stays home and obeys and serves his father.
 - Yet at the end, the older son is furious with the father and humiliates him by refusing to go into the great feast. This is the older son's way of saying that he will not live in the same family with the younger son. So again the family's integrity and the father's heart are under assault—this time by the elder brother.
 - Why? The elder brother objects to the expense of what the father is doing, as we will see. He shows that he has been obeying the father to get his things, and not because he loves him, since he is willing to put him to shame. Both the older and younger sons love the father's things, but not the father.

2. The response to the request—verse 12b, 20-24.

- The younger's son request to the father would have shocked Jesus' listeners, but the father's response is even more remarkable. This was a patriarchal society, in which you were required to show deference and reverence toward those older or above you. This kind of contempt and insolence would have ordinarily met with outrage. The listeners would expect the father to explode in wrath, to drive the son out with blows.
- Instead, we read the simple words, "so he divided his property between them." We need to put ourselves into the historical context. In those days, most of a family's wealth was in their land and property. Indeed, their family land was part of their very identity. It is likely that the father had to sell some of his land in order to become "liquid" and give his younger son his share.
- This is reflected in the unusual Greek word used in verse 12 translated as "property." It is the word "*bios*" which means "life." It says, literally, he divided his "life" between them. Why use that word? Probably it was a way to convey what it felt like for the father to lose his land, his family's good name and status, and the presence of one of his two sons. The father is being asked to tear his very life apart—and he does.
- The older son and anyone else in the community would have thought that the father was being foolish to give in to the younger son's request. But looking back, we know better. If the father had become embittered, and had perhaps beaten the young man or done something else severe to him, no restoration would have ever happened. The father's heart would have been too hardened to ever receive him back, and the son may never have expected or wanted the father to do so.
- By bearing the agony and pain of the son's sin himself, instead of taking revenge, instead of paying the son back by inflicting pain on him, the father kept the door open in the relationship. The father was willing to suffer for the sin of the child, so that some day reconciliation would be possible.

3. What difference it makes for us.

- First, it means that whether we are irreligious, free-wheeling, "younger brother" types *or* moral, religious "elder brother" types, we have a problem with what Augustine calls "inordinate love" or idols of the heart.
 - For example, imagine a wife who has a husband who spends hours with another woman talking about all his and her problems, and he goes traveling with this other woman, and talks and thinks about her incessantly. So the wife confronts her husband and he says, "What's the problem? I married you, didn't I? I pay the mortgage, don't I? I do all my duties, don't I? If someone asks, I say you are my wife. Why are you so upset?" The wife will say (rightly) that someone else has captured his heart and imagination.

- Many of us are like the elder brother. We may obey all the rules, but our real heart and passion is something else—our career, or making money, or our children, or peer acceptance. If any thing has a controlling position in our heart, if any thing is more important to our happiness than God—then that thing is a “god” to us, an “inordinate love.”
- Recognize these things for what they are. Do you see them in your own heart and life? Once we see these things for what they are, what can be done about them?
- Second, it means that our Lord has done for us what the father in the parable did for his son.
 - When God came into this world, we would have expected him to come in wrath, to appear and drive us out with blows. But he did not. He didn’t come with a sword in his hand, but with nails in his hands. He didn’t come to bring judgment, but to *bear* our judgment.
 - Jesus went to the cross in weakness, and there, voluntarily, his life was literally torn apart. And for his only property left, his garment, they cast lots. But he did it so that, when we repent, like the younger son, forgiveness and reconciliation is now available.
 - And how does this help us with our “disordered loves”? Objectively, it means there is real, true forgiveness for them. Our guilt is dealt with by Jesus’ blood. Subjectively, when we see the absolute beauty of what Jesus has done for us, it captures our hearts. Money can’t die for us, popularity can’t die for us. There is nothing more beautiful in all of reality than the picture of a perfectly happy Being, leaving all the bliss of heaven, and sacrificing everything for the sake of rebellious, undeserving, ungrateful people. The more you look at Jesus doing that, the more you will love him above anyone or anything else. He will capture your heart so that nothing matters more than he does. When you see what he’s done for you, it makes the worst times bearable and the best times leave-able.
 - As John Newton wrote,

Our pleasure and our duty,
 Though opposite before,
 Since we have seen His beauty,
 Are joined to part no more:
 It is our highest pleasure,
 No less than duty’s call,
 To love Him beyond measure,
 And serve Him with our all.

Good source books:

St. Augustine Confessions. Trans. by H.Chadwick. Oxford, 1998.
 Bailey, Kenneth. *Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15*. Concordia, 1992.
 Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. Baker, 1994.
 Ellis, E.Earle. *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*. Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1974.
 Wilcock, Michael. *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Luke*. IVP, 1979.

Sessions:

Session	Sermon	Book Chapters	DVD	Group Study
ONE - The Parable			Film	✓
TWO - The People Around Jesus	✓	Introduction and Chapter 1	Session Two Clip	✓
THREE - The Two Lost Sons	✓	Chapters 2 and 3	Session Three Clip	✓
FOUR - The Elder Brother	✓	Chapter 4	Session Four Clip	✓
FIVE - The True Elder Brother	✓	Chapter 5	Session Five Clip	✓
SIX - The Feast of the Father	✓	Chapters 6 and 7	Session Six Clip	✓