

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 59: "THE LOST SONS"
LUKE 15:11-32
Ps. Jeffrey Susila

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, I'm Jeff. I'm one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to be preaching the Word of God for us today.

Before we begin, please take out your own copy of God's Word and any note-taking materials you need, whether physical or digital. For reference, I'll be preaching from the English Standard Version (or ESV).

Now if you're using digital devices, please turn off all notifications and put aside any distractions as best as we can, so that we can give our hearts and our full attention to the preaching of God's Word.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 59 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "The Lost Sons"

Sermon Introduction

- Now, something you guys may know about me... I'm not the best with my sense of directions. I'll admit that.
 - Though I'd like to think that I'm slowly getting better...
 - But what still really throws me off... are the parking lots inside of malls.
 - So confusing! And I can never remember where I parked my car.
 - Or if I do remember, then I can't remember how to actually get there.
 - And so what I end up doing - and maybe some of you do this too... I take a photo of where I parked.
 - Because if I don't, then I wouldn't remember - I'd stray away from my actual parking spot, and I'd just be wandering around, trying to find my car for more than 30 minutes.
 -
- And this is only one example of the many times that I've gotten lost - where I've strayed away from where I should be...
- But as sinners, what's even more serious... is that - not only can we get physically lost - but we can also be spiritually lost...
 - Straying away from the path that we should be, and going further away from God.
- So today, we'll take a look at 2 examples from 2 sons who are each spiritually lost, but in different ways.
- And by the end, I hope we can see that even though we tend to stray away as sinners, God still pursues after us with His grace...

The One Thing

***Sinners get lost in different ways,
but God pursues them with His grace.***

Scripture Introduction

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Luke 15:11-32.

- In last week's passage, Jesus told two parables about a lost sheep and a lost coin. And we learned that God values and seeks after His lost ones.
 - And that when one sinner repents, Heaven rejoices and celebrates!
- In today's passage, Jesus will continue his story with a third parable regarding the lost...

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 15:11-32.

¹¹ And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

The 1st Lost Son

- I. The younger son's worldliness leads to emptiness (vv.11-16)
- II. The father's grace and mercy lead to life (vv.17-24)

The 2nd Lost Son

- III. The older son's self-righteousness leads to anger (vv.25-30)
- The father's grace and mercy lead to joy (vv.31-32)

I. The younger son's worldliness leads to emptiness (vv.11-16)

- So as Jesus is telling his parables, we know - back from verses 1-2 - that there are two groups of people surrounding him:
 - One group - are the tax collectors and sinners.
 - And the other group - are the Pharisees and the Scribes.
 - 2 very very different groups of Jewish people.
 - The tax collectors were the outcasts of the Jewish community:
 - They were seen as traitors among their own people.
 - And that's because they're Jews, but they've chosen to work for the Roman government - collecting taxes from their own people, oftentimes making them pay more than what's needed so that they could keep the extra money.
 - They're seen as unrighteous, immoral men.
 - Now on the other hand, the Pharisees and Scribes were the religious leaders of the Jewish community and they see themselves as righteous and moral men because they follow the Jewish rules and traditions very strictly.
 - And as they also gathered before Jesus, they were grumbling amongst themselves, "Why is this Jesus fellow spending time with tax collectors and sinners?"
- Jesus heard their grumbling, and responded by sharing with them 3 parables. We heard the first two last week, and we just heard the 3rd parable today, and this parable probably sounds very familiar to a lot of us here.
 - It's one of Jesus' most famous parables known as "the parable of the prodigal son."
 - But we can forget that he's not the only main character in this story.
 - Jesus begins his 3rd parable, saying "there was a man with two sons."
 - There are 3 main characters here:
 - The father
 - The younger son
 - And the older son
 - So it's important for us to turn our attention to - not only the prodigal son (who's the younger son) - but to all 3 main characters in order to understand the parable more fully.
- So let's jump into the story...

[The younger son] said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.'

- In Jewish culture - similar to ours - the children would normally receive an inheritance after their father's death.
- So this younger son is basically telling his father, "You're dead to me. I don't want to have anything to do with you. I just want what's rightfully mine. And I don't want to wait. I want it now!"
 - This is completely offensive and disrespectful.

[So what did the father do?] Even though his son was so disrespectful to him, he [willingly] divided his property between them.

- He gave the younger son his portion.
- And he gave the older son his portion (but we won't see the older son till later).

Follow along with me - verse 13 - Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country...

- So he gathered all that he had...
 - Which implies that he sold everything that his father gave him in exchange for cash - he gathered all that he had in preparation to leave.
- He had no intention of staying with his father or his brother.
 - He just wanted to enjoy his life and enjoy his new-found fortune.
 - He's probably thinking, "I can do whatever I want now. I can buy and experience all that life has to offer."
- And then he moved to a faraway country (a gentile country, far away from his own Jewish people).

[And what did he do there?] And there he squandered his property in reckless living.

- His part of the father's fortune gone! Just like that.
 - What took the father his entire life to accumulate, this younger son wasted in the blink of an eye.
 - He didn't save some of it; he didn't invest some of it.
 - He spent it all on reckless living - and we know later from the older son that this younger son spent his money on prostitutes, and most likely a life of extravagance.

But this makes me ask myself, "how could he waste so much money on wild, reckless living?"

- I think it's because those things never satisfied him fully.
 - So then he kept wanting more and more.
 - And kept spending more and more...
- This was probably how he thought that he'd have a sense of fulfilment in his life - that to have a fulfilled life, he needs to experience the worlds' pleasures.
 - (like sex, money, and extravagance).
- But those things never filled him.
- But he still kept wasting more and more money on those things (hoping that he'll finally be filled).
 - He kept doing that till he had nothing left.
 - Till all he had was the clothes he's wearing.

Verse 14 - And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

- Talk about bad timing.
- When he had spent everything and had nothing left, there was a famine in that country - a major shortage of food.
 - So the prices of food would've skyrocketed.
 - He wouldn't be able to afford any food or eat anything.

And in his desperation - verse 15 - he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

- Pigs were considered unclean by the Jews. This would've been such a disgusting job for this younger son.
- And in the end, we're not even sure if he was paid by this man - because verse 16 says that no one gave him anything.
- No one was there to provide help for him. Even if he had friends from his partying days, they're now gone.

And he became so desperate that he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate.

- That he wanted nothing more than to be able to eat the pig's food (that's how desperate he became).
- This is not where this younger son thought he'd be.
 - He's lost! He's strayed away...
 - His life was not supposed to go this way.
 - Instead of enjoyment, pleasure, and fulfilment... What he has now is emptiness.
- And perhaps some of us can also relate - we're not where we thought we'd be.
 - We're also feeling a bit empty inside...
 - Maybe that's because the world has taught us that fulfilment comes from living our lives to the fullest - by enjoying what life has to offer.

- Doesn't matter if you're a teenager or a working adult, single or married... the world (through movies, social media, advertisements) teaches us that what we need is:
 - Beauty, money, material possessions, career, success, relationships, sex, and other worldly pleasures.
 - And if you don't have (or if you don't experience) those things, then you're not living life.
 - And so maybe we feel a bit empty because we don't have some of those things..
- But here, we're warned that pursuing worldliness leads to emptiness.
 - It will lead you astray. It won't lead you to where you think it will.
- Now some of us may not really relate with this younger son... maybe because we're currently not feeling empty... but maybe you're still thinking, "but if I just have that one thing, then my life would be even better."
 - But what's the trajectory of your life?
 - Just look at where this younger son ended up, those things never satisfied him.
 - That mindset actually shows that you're actually also empty - because you're waiting for that one thing to fill you up even more (like an empty cup waiting to be filled).
 - But essentially, you're still empty. You're waiting to be filled.
- So the next question may be "then what can actually fill us up?"
- Well, in these moments when we feel empty, and everything is lost, there is still hope...

II. The father's grace and mercy lead to life (vv.17-24)

[As the younger son longed to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate] - verse 17 - he came to himself, he said, 'how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

- When everything seemed lost, he finally came to his senses. This younger son remembers his father. This is his turning point.
 - He remembers that his father was compassionate, even to his hired servants - he would feed them generously, and they'd have more than enough bread to eat.
- Look at verses 18-19. The son comes up with his next steps:
 - 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."
 - The son realizes his sins.
 - That he has sinned against his father and against God with his wasteful living.
 - He understands that he's not worthy to be called his son.
 - He's aware that what's fair... is for him to be treated as a hired servant, not as a son (he's disowned his father).
 - But still, he decided to make the long and shameful journey back home.
 - Each step, he's reminded of his sins, failures, and shame.
 - Each step, he may be rehearsing the line that he'll be saying to his father over and over again.
 - Each step, he may be imagining the people of the town mocking him and laughing at him.
 - Yet he still takes each step toward his father.
 - This is an image of true repentance...
 - Someone who not only knows what they did is wrong, who not only admits that what they've done is sinful (that they've sinned against

God), but they don't stop there - they turn - turning the opposite direction from their sins, and toward their Heavenly Father.

- True repentance not only turns away from sin, but turns toward our Heavenly Father - not turning toward another thing that leads to sin.
 - Notice how this younger son didn't just turn to another person who could hire him, he's turning to his father.
 - Is this our view of repentance?
 - Or do we realize and admit that what we're doing is wrong and sinful, yet we don't turn away from it (or we turn to another sin), and we remain consumed by it - leaving us empty and only wanting more?
 - What happens when we do repent of our sins and turn to our Heavenly Father?
- Well, as the younger son repents, let's see what happens next...
- Verse 20 - we see that as the younger son nears the town - but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran toward him.
 - He saw him when he was still a long way off, which means that he was looking for him.
 - His father has not forgotten him. And felt compassion toward him. He still loved him.
 - He's been seeking his lost son.
 - Looking at the horizon patiently, waiting for his lost son to repent and return home.
 - And the father ran toward his son while he was still far away.
 - So I imagine him walking through the town, heading to the outskirts where his son was at.
- The Pharisees listening to this parable might've been grumbling again at this point.
 - Because during those times, it would've been very abnormal for a nobleman, such as this father, to run.
 - Running was not done by people of higher status and honor.
 - But this father lowered himself.
 - Instead of keeping his own honor by having the son come up to him, admit his mistake, and to beg him to allow him to work for him...
 - Instead, he was the one who lowered his status, and ran toward him - he pursued him.
 - And then he embraced his son and kissed him.
- He forgives his son. His father is merciful.
- And as the father is embracing and kissing his son, the son finally tells him - "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."
 - But then look at verse 21 - it seems like he didn't even get to finish his full line - the line that he's probably been rehearsing over and over again in his mind.
 - Before he got the chance to say, "treat me as one of your hired servants," his father seems to cut him off mid-sentence.
- And the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.
 - It's clear to everyone there that the father does not see his younger son as anything less than his son.
 - And he covers his son with the full status of sonship.
 - With the best robe.
 - A ring on his hand - perhaps a ring with the family seal.
 - And with shoes on his feet.
 - He's given full status and authority as a son at his father's house.
- And the father said, "bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

- Out of all the different scenarios that he might've played in his mind on his way back, this was beyond anything that this younger son could ever imagine.
- The Pharisees listening to this parable may be grumbling once again - "what is this father doing? The son doesn't deserve all that. What the son deserves is punishment!"
 - And they'd be correct - what's just is for this son to be punished.
 - He's basically disowned his father (acting as if he's already dead and asking for his portion of the family inheritance), so it would've been fair for his father to disown him too!
- And so, isn't it the same for us then? Because we've also started away from God. Pursuing our own pleasures instead.
 - We've sinned against our God.
 - We rather take His good gifts and then live our own lives apart from Him.
 - And so what we justly deserve is also for God to separate Himself from us.
 - What we deserve is eternal separation from God in Hell.
- But our God is merciful, which means that he doesn't give us the punishment that we should've gotten.
- Instead, He chose to forgive us of our sins.
 - And that's made possible because Jesus came from Heaven to Earth to save us. He lowered himself for us, and ran toward us. He had compassion for us (and pursued us).
 - Jesus lived the perfect life that we could not. And so when he died on the cross, he didn't die for his own sins, but he died for our sins as our substitute.
 - And while he's covered in our sin and shame, Jesus covers us with his righteousness.
 - Imagine yourselves now wearing a robe of Jesus' righteousness.
 - So now when God sees you, he no longer sees your sins, but sees Jesus' righteousness instead.
 - You're made right in the sight of God.
 - And those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour are adopted into God's family as children - full status as sons and daughters of God.
 - And one day, we'll be welcomed into our Heavenly home where our Heavenly Father is waiting for us.
 - And in Heaven, we'll have eternal life.
 - These are all good gifts from God that we don't deserve - the gifts of justification, adoption, and eternal life.
 - Thus, God is not only merciful with us in withholding His wrath, but He's also gracious - which means that He gives us good gifts that we don't deserve.
 - God is like a spring of living water that never runs dry - God can continue to fill our empty cup - satisfying us and filling our cups fully with his love, grace, and mercy.

This is our God - He loves sinners (even the worst of them) - and he is gracious and merciful toward His people. Is this the God who you worship?

If this sounds new to you, please come up to me after the service and I'd love to talk to you more about Jesus. And if this sounds familiar to you, but you're unsure and still have many questions, I'd also love to talk to you more.

- Let's not assume that we're not lost...
- And I hope we all can see that the proper response to our sinfulness - like this younger son - is to repent of our sins and turn to God, confessing our faith in Him.
 - And we can say to Him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your child. But by your grace and mercy, my sins against Heaven are forgiven, and you deem me worthy to be called your child."
- And when even one sinner repents and is saved, all of Heaven celebrates.
 - But, we'll see next that not everyone is joyful when a sinner repents...

III. The older son's self-righteousness leads to anger (vv.25-32)

- 25 “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.
 - And he kept working for his father, working in the field.
 - But as he came home from work, he's confused - “why do I hear music and dancing coming from the house?”
- 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he was angry and refused to go in.
 - He didn't want to be part of the celebration. This older son would rather stay outside the house because he was upset.
- When his father noticed that his older son was just staying outside of the house...
- His father came out and entreated him [he invited him to enter the house]
-
- 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.’³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!
 - The older brother is angry. He's thinking: “Look! It's not fair!”
 - I deserve to be rewarded; he doesn't!
 - But not only did you reward him, you gave him a fattened calf! (That's worth even more than a young goat! We'd usually save that for special occasions and banquets). That's not fair!
- But what can we learn from the older brother's anger?
 - He's actually also lost (just like his younger brother). But they're just lost in different ways.
 - The younger brother was lost in his worldliness.
 - While this older brother is lost in his self-righteousness.
- And what's happening here is that this older son is not able to see his father's action toward his brother as an act of grace.
 - Instead he sees it as an unjust reward for his brother. That's why he's angry.
 - But he's actually somewhat correct. His younger brother is undeserving of his rewards.
 - But that's the point. His father is gracious.
 - He rewards his son - not on the basis of the son's merits - but on the basis of his grace.
- But the older son is, unfortunately, not able to see this because he's self-righteous.
 - He believes that he's already good because of all the good things that he's already done.
 - He feels like he's deserving of his father's gifts, and that's why he doesn't feel like he even needs his father's grace.
 - And that's why it's also hard for him (and for the Pharisees) to understand the concept of grace - they feel like they don't need it.
- The Pharisees listening to this would agree with this older brother - “Ya, that's not fair!”
 - “The younger son should be punished & the older son should be rewarded!”
 - “This father's sense of judgment is messed up.”
- Perhaps some of us are also thinking this way. That's not fair!
- Which means that if we couldn't relate with the younger brother, then perhaps we can relate more with the older brother.

- Because as Christians, some of us started out more like the younger brother.
 - We've realized that we strayed away from God, and by His grace and mercy we're welcomed back into His presence.
- But over time, we may slowly become more like the older brother - forgetting that all that we have was because of God's grace and mercy in the first place.
 - And our sinful tendency draws us back into a life of self-centeredness and self-righteousness.

How can we tell if we're being self-righteous? There are some signs...

- If you cannot acknowledge that you're weak, needy, and sinful.
- Or if you do acknowledge it, you minimize it by comparing yourself to others.
 - "I know I am sinful, but I'm not as bad, and am more capable than that person."
 - And that's basically what the older brother did.
- And it can lead to anger - anger towards God.
 - We can think, "God, I've done so much work for you. More than that person. But why is His life easier than mine?! Mine should be better."
- And, in his anger, look at what this older son did (or didn't do)
 - He didn't even call his father "father."
 - And he didn't call his brother "brother." He refers to him as "this son of yours."
 - His self-righteousness and anger is causing him to separate himself from his father...
 - We can easily separate ourselves from our Heavenly Father as well.
 - Only desiring God's gifts like the younger son and not desiring a relationship with God.
 - Or like the older son, we only stay near to God for His blessings, but then we separate ourselves from God when we're angry at Him because He's not giving us what we think we deserve...
- So just like worldliness, self-righteousness also leads us astray from our God...
- But let's take a closer look at what the father tells his older son (because it'll also be applicable to us)...

IV. The father's grace and mercy lead to joy (vv.31-32)

In response to the older son's anger, the father says this in verses 31-32:

³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

- He's basically saying, "I love you too. You're always with me, and all that is mine is yours. You don't need to work your way to earn a young goat or a fattened calf. All that is mine is already yours."
- This puts things into the father's perspective.
 - He also cares for his older son very much.
 - In fact, he also graciously lowered himself to pursue after his older son.
 - He could've just let him remain outside.
 - But the father left the celebration in order to go outside and be with his older son.
 - The father cares for him - he wants the son to understand his heart so that he would come in and join in the joy and the celebration.
- He says all that is mine is yours - all...
 - So he's basically saying, "Even this celebration belongs to you as well. It belongs to us as a family because your brother has returned!"

- He was dead and is now alive, he was lost and is now found.
- We don't know how the older brother responded. Whether he was able to repent of his sins, head into the house, reconcile with his brother, and join in the celebration or not.
- But this parable also shows God's invitation to the Pharisees as they're listening to this story...
 - Even as they're separating themselves from Jesus in their self-righteousness and anger, Jesus is still inviting the Pharisees and Scribes to come into his joy.
 - The invitation is also open for them.
 - The message for the Pharisees is: don't grumble...
 - But repent and enter into God's joy in celebration with fellow brothers and sisters.
 - Repentance is the pathway to joy.
- So the proper response would be for the older brother to say:
 - "Father, I have sinned against you. I have lost my way. But thank you for pursuing me. It's only by your grace and mercy that I have all that I have in the first place. By your grace alone am I able to enter into your home, and celebrate with my brother. I thank you."
 - And his father would love for his older son to enter the house, reconcile with his brother, and for them to celebrate together as one family.

Now for those of us who were once lost, but have now put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are now found. And this joy and celebration is what awaits us in Heaven.

- So how about us today? This parable is also God's invitation for us...
 - Have we truly received our Father's love? His grace and mercy?
 - Have we turned away from our sins and turned to him?
 - Not only the first time, but have we continuously said "no" to our sinful tendencies? Have we continuously walked away from our sins, taking steps toward our Father each day?
- And do we know of anyone who is straying away from God in the way that they're living their lives?
 - Will we go after them, reminding them of God's truths? Or will we stand back in judgment, grumbling like the Pharisees?
 - As God's grace and mercy fills us, may it overflow within us and unto others (like a cup overflowing with water, filling other cups).

Our God longs to see the day where all of His children will be with him in His Heavenly Kingdom. Until that day, let's be reminded of His grace and mercy.

To help us with our next steps, here are 4 life applications...

Life Application

1. Reflect - what are some of our sinful tendencies that are leading us astray?
 - Is it worldliness like the younger brother? Or is it self-righteousness like the older brother?
 - Let's not assume that we'll never go astray and be lost.
 - Let's take our sins seriously, knowing that - as sinners - our tendency is to separate ourselves from our God.
2. Remember the Gospel.
 - The turning point for the younger son was when he remembered his father.
 - As we think about our sins, let's also remind ourselves of the Gospel - that we do not need to be afraid to confess our sins to God - that Jesus already died for us, he's the one inviting us to repent and turn to him, and all of Heaven is ready to celebrate when even one sinner repents...

3. Truly repent by turning away from our sins, and turning to God.

- As we turn, we simultaneously turn away from something and turn toward something else.
- Let's truly repent by turning away from our sins and turning to God (not to another source of sin that will keep us lost).

4. Pursue after the lost.

- Let's remember that we were once also lost.
- Yet God graciously pursued us with His grace.
- Let's extend that same grace (that God has given to us) unto others by pursuing those who are straying away - checking up on them, and reminding them that they're card for.

The One Thing

*Sinners get lost in different ways,
but God pursues them with His grace.*

Conclusion

If you're able, can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?