

Fathers day Bible reading: Luke 15:11-32

C.f. Exam Howler. "Elephants, being very large animals are very seldom lost!"

The fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel has been called "the gospel in the gospel."

Three lost things. These three parables are not simply three ways of stating the same thing.

- The **sheep** went lost through sheer foolishness.
- The **coin** was lost through no fault of its own.
- The **son** deliberately went lost, callously turning his back on his **father**.

The love of God can defeat the **foolishness** of man, the seduction of the **tempting** voices, and even the **deliberate rebellion** of the heart.

Vv11-32. This has been called the greatest short story in the world.

There are three main characters.

1. The younger son.

a) **The background.** Under Jewish law a father was not free to leave his property as he liked.

- The elder son must get two-thirds and the younger one-third. (Deut.21:17.)
- The younger son said in effect, "Give me now the part of the estate I will get anyway when you are dead, and let me get out of this."

b) **His actions.** The father knew that if the son was ever to learn he must learn the hard way; and he granted his request.

- Without delay the son realized his share of the property and left home. He soon ran through the money; and he finished up feeding pigs, a task that was forbidden to a Jew because the law said, "Cursed is he who feeds swine."

c) **His decision.** "When he came to himself," the son decided to come home and plead to be taken back **not** as a **son** but in the lowest rank of the hired servants, the men who were only day labourers.

- The hired servant could be dismissed at a day's notice. He was not one of the family at all.
- He came home; and, his father never gave him the chance to ask to be a servant. He broke in before that.

2. The forgiving Father.

The robe stands for **honour**; the ring for **authority**; giving him the power of attorney; the **shoes** for a son as opposed to a **slave**. And a **feast** was made that all might rejoice at the wanderer's return.

(i) It should **not** have been called the parable of the **Prodigal Son**, for the son is not the hero. It should be called the **parable of the Loving Father**, for it tells us rather about a father's **love** than a son's **sin**.

(ii) It tells us about the **forgiveness of God**. The father must have been waiting and watching for the son to come home, for he saw **him a long way off**.

- He forgave him with no **recriminations**. There is a way of forgiving, when **forgiveness** is conferred as a **favour**.
- It is even worse, when someone is forgiven, but always **by hint and by word and by threat** his sin is held over him.

The love of God treats **us** like that.

3. The Elder brother.

The elder brother was actually sorry that his brother had come home. He stands for the self-righteous who would rather see a sinner destroyed than saved.

(i) His **attitude** shows that his years of obedience to his father had been years of grim duty and not of loving service.

(ii) His **attitude** is one of utter lack of **sympathy**.

- He refers to the prodigal, **not as any brother, but as your son**. He would have kicked a man farther into the gutter when he was already down.

(iii) He had a peculiarly **nasty** mind.

- There is no mention of harlots until he mentions them. He, no doubt, suspected his brother of the sins he himself would have liked to commit.

Once again we have the amazing truth that

- it is easier to confess to God than it is to many a man;
- that God is more merciful in his judgments than many an orthodox man; that the love of God is far broader than the love of man;
- and that God can forgive when men refuse to forgive.
- **In face of a love like that we cannot be other than lost in wonder, love and praise.**