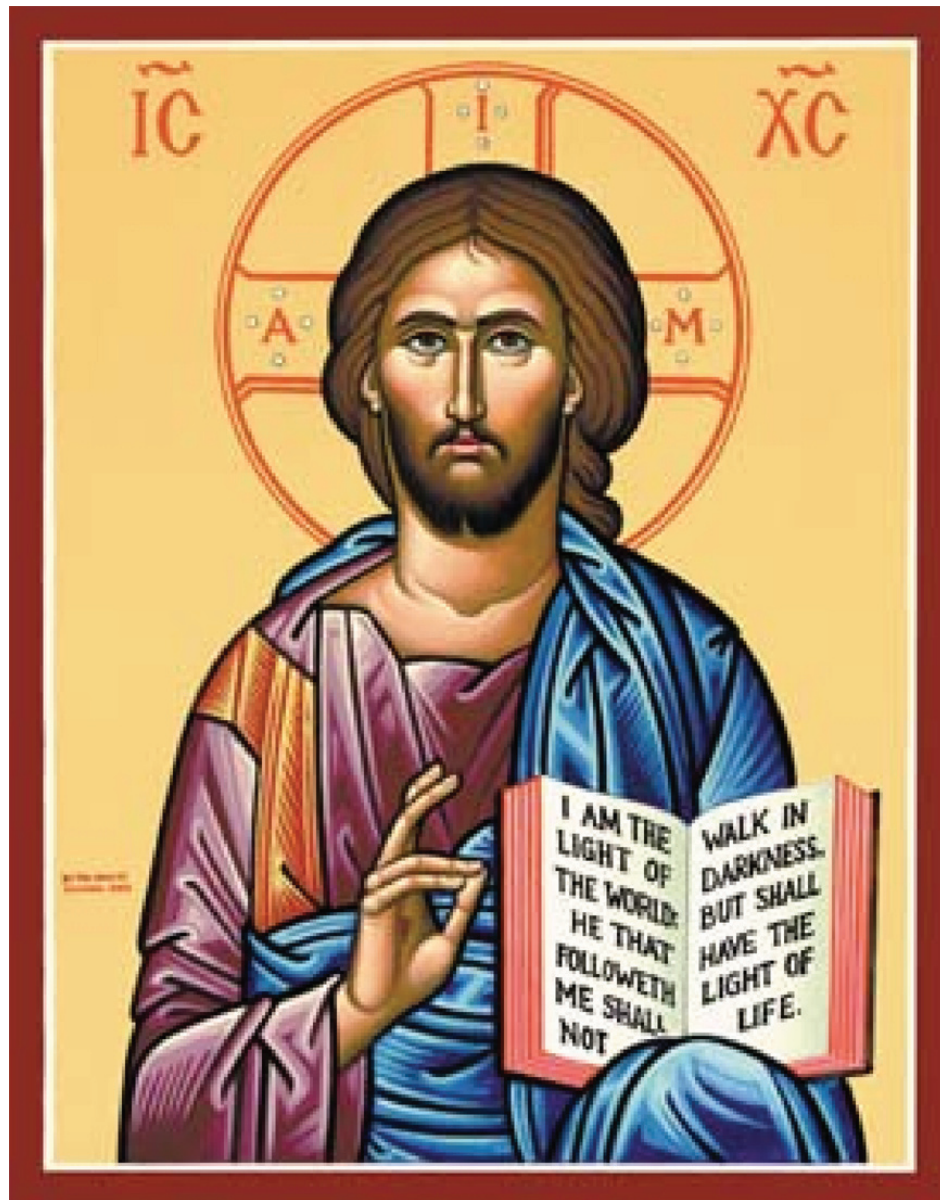


# Life of Christ

## A Study of the Four Gospels



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By **Pastor Edward F. Markquart**  
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Des Moines, Washington, USA

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### Session 33 | Theme: Uniquely Luke (4) Journey to Jerusalem

(Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Lost Son)

- *Prayer*
- *Questions from last week's session*
- *Finish sections of the lesson not completed last week*

#### Luke's "travel narrative"

- In this section of our study of the life of Christ, we are closely examining those stories which are part of Luke's "travel narrative."
- All the stories that we are studying are unique to Luke.
- We are not closely examining Jesus' teachings on discipleship that are in Q and are in this section. We have previously studied these teachings in Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 10-12.
- In this section of the course (Luke 10-18), we are studying different clusters of themes:
  - Prayer
  - Money (last week)
  - Lost/found (repentance, restoration)
  - Humility (next week)

#### Today, we will study four parables that have the same theme: repentance and restoration.

- #207 Repentance and Destruction (Parable of the Barren Fig Tree)
- #219 Parable of the Lost Sheep
- #220 Parable of the Lost Coin
- #221 Parable of the Lost (Prodigal) Son

## #207. Repentance and Destruction (Parable of the Barren Fig Tree)

### Luke 13:1-9

- We will study Luke 13:1-5 here, but we will also study the parable of the fig tree later in the Jesus Story when Jesus gets to Jerusalem.
- In Luke's gospel, we are reminded that Jesus often invites us to repent, turn our lives around, get rid of old bad habits and produce the genuine fruits of repentance.
- We remember that "repentance" was an important word for Jesus. Examples are:
  - Mark 1:15, Jesus opened his ministry with "The time is fulfilled/ripe. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel."
  - Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to *repentance*."
  - Luke 15:7 "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who *repents* than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no *repentance*."
  - Luke 24:46-47 which summarizes Jesus' whole life and the message of the Christian faith, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that *repentance* and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations."
- There is an eternal oscillation between the two poles of the earth, the north pole and the south pole.
- Similarly in life, there is an eternal oscillation in our lives between death and resurrection, Good Friday and Easter, repentance and forgiveness, selfishness and selflessness.
- This oscillation between repentance and forgiveness never ends during our lifetime.
- An analogy about the *necessity* of repenting and cleaning up the sin in our lives. One Sunday in Advent, there was a Christmas tree in our sanctuary. The Christmas tree was beautiful but the lights would not come on. Why? I showed the children the electric plug. I had put tape on the plug so that the plug to the Christmas lights could not be connected with electric power. I asked the children what I should do? The children all shouted, "Take off the tape." I did, and as soon as I scrapped off the tape and the crud, the power could flow from the light source into the lights on the Christmas tree. The tree glowed with its lights. Similarly, some of us Christians do not have the power of Christ and the light of Christ in our lives because our contact with God needs to be cleansed. That is repentance. That is what John the Baptist was all about. This is what Jesus meant when he said at the foot washing on Holy Thursday in the Book of John: "To be my disciple, you must be clean."
- Repentance is cleaning away the sin which is deep within us, so that we can make contact with the power of God which then flows into us and lightens up our lives.
- It is with these perceptions about repentance that we approach the following parable in Luke 13 and the three parables in Luke 15 about the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son.

**-There were some present at that very time who told him/Jesus of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.** In other words, Pilate executed some Galileans and then mixed the Galilean human blood with animal blood of their sacrifices. Pilate comes off as brutally cruel.

This is the first time in the gospels that we meet Pontius Pilate and we will study him more thoroughly during the trials of Jesus.

We know a great deal of historical information about Pilate:

The following material comes from Josephus, the historian, and Philo, the Jewish theologian, both writing at this time.

- We know that Pilate was the governor of Jerusalem and Judea.
- We know that Pontius Pilate was governor for ten years from the year 26-36 CE.
- We know that Pilate experienced thirty-two riots in those ten years.
- We know that the Jews hated the Romans, hated the Roman taxes, and hated the Roman insensitivities to their religion.
- We know that Pilate wanted money to be taken from the temple treasury in order to build a pipeline to bring water into the city of Jerusalem.
- We know that Pilate stole or borrowed the money from the temple treasury to build his aqueduct.
- We know that Pilate's taking money from the temple treasury precipitated some of the riots.
- We know that Pilate ordered his soldiers to dress up as plain-clothes men, secretly to arm themselves and mingle with the rioting mobs. As the signal was given, these Roman soldiers, dressed as civilians, bludgeoned the Jews with their weapons, clubbing and stabbing the Jews to death.
- We know the neighboring governors started sending letters to Emperor Tiberius in Rome complaining about Pilate's brutality in handling the riots.
- We know that shortly thereafter, Pilate was removed from office because of his brutal handling of the riots.
- We know that on Pilate's trip back to Rome, Emperor Tiberius died, and we don't ever know what happened to Pilate.
- We know that Pilate disappeared into the pages of history, only to have his name repeated every Sunday in our creed, "crucified under Pontius Pilate." Maybe our creed should have said, "Jesus was crucified *under the riots of* Pontius Pilate."

**-Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered like this? I tell you no.** Jesus asked the crowd a profound question: "Do you think the sins of those Galileans caused their suffering?" Among many people, it was falsely assumed that suffering was the consequence of sinful actions. That would mean that the executed Galileans were killed because they were worse sinners than the other Galileans who were not killed. Jesus disagreed with this line of reasoning.

Jesus did not embrace a simplistic, one to one correlation, that sin causes all suffering.

**-But unless you repent, you will likewise perish.** Jesus used the occasion of suffering as a call to repentance and the amendment of life. There was still time for people to repent and change their lives for the better. There was still time to get rid of those bad, unhealthy habits and attitudes and enter the kingdom of God and become a new person.

**-Or the eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them. Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?** Jesus referred to a serious tragedy that was part of the public news of the time. Siloam was a "suburb" of Jerusalem, south of the city, and news must have traveled fast and far. Jesus said to the effect: "These eighteen people did *not* die in a tragedy because they were greater sinners than others in town. Rather, this tragic incident is a call for each one of you to repent, to examine your own lives and make the necessary changes that go with being my disciple." The news-making tragedy was an invitation for self-examination and change and to begin to produce the fruits of repentance.

Often tragedies that occur around us may speak to us in such a way that we begin to change some undesirable defects of our character. For example, a man may be under the influence of alcohol, has a car accident, kills someone and that tragedy may become a "wake up call" for him to change his drinking habits. The person "wakes us" to his/her drinking patterns and finally realizes that changes need to be made.

Later, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, we will hear about the wayward son “coming to his senses” or “waking up” about his condition and foolish choices.

**-Unless you repent, you will likewise perish.** The word, “perish,” is referring to the End of Time, the Final Judgment, The Day that determines our final destiny.

Jesus’ teachings are clear but not popular in today’s society when the Spirit of Jesus still teaches that people who do not repent will die eternally.

In the previous lesson about the parable about the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Rich Man failed to repent and died eternally. In that story, you get the feeling that the five brothers of the Rich Man may not repent either and that they too will die eternally with their brother, Dives.

**-And he/Jesus told this parable.** Jesus then told a parable that is familiar to many of us. It is the parable of the barren fig tree.

Notice this parable is found in the parallels of Matthew 21 and Mark 11 which Jesus told during his final week in Jerusalem. In Matthew and Mark, the parable of the fig tree is a parable of judgment: “May no fruit come from you ever again. And the fig tree withered at once.”

Here in the Gospel of Luke, this parable is an invitation to repent, amend one’s life and produce the fruit of genuine repentance. That is what the Rich Man should have done in the previous parable. This is what the Rich Man’s five brothers need to do.

**Let it/the fig tree alone this year also until I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year well and good; but if it does not, you can cut it down.** Luke constructs the parable of the fig tree with an element of hope. There is still time for the fig tree to bear fruit. There is still time for your life to bear fruit. There is still time to dig around the fig tree (your life, my life) and loosen up the ground and then put manure on the ground. “If it bears fruit next year, well and good. But if it does not, you can cut it down.” In Luke’s version of the parable of the fig tree, there is still time for us to change. In Luke’s version of the parable of the fig tree, there is still time for the five brothers here on earth to repent and produce the fruit of righteousness (and take care of Lazarus’s relatives) here on earth.

The twin tragedies of the execution of the Galileans and the eighteen killed by a falling tower are two occasions for us to think about our eternal destiny.

The twin tragedies are an invitation for us to make changes in our lives so that we are better prepared for our eternal destiny.

## Paintings of a fig tree that needs pruning



[The Fig tree, Caspar Luiken](#)



[The Gardener and the Fig Tree, James Tissot](#)

*“Like a tree, it is best for me to be pruned of a lot of dead branches so I can be ready to bear good fruit. I can think of changed people as trees which have been stripped of their old branches, pruned, cut and bare. But through the dark, seemingly dead branches flows silently, secretly, the new sap, until with the sun of spring, comes new life. There are new leaves, buds, blossoms and fruit, many times better because of the pruning. I am in the hands of God, a master gardener, who makes no mistakes in pruning.”*



### Discussion Question:

Give an example from your own life where it took time for you to become aware of your own shortcomings and then the needed healthy changes slowly occurred in you?

## #219. The Parable of the Lost Sheep (p. 194) Luke 15:1-7

- Many Biblical scholars think that Luke 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) is the high point of the travel narrative and the entire gospels.
- It has been called “The Heart of the Third Gospel.” (Arthur Just, LUKE, v. 2, p. 586).
- The three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son are invitations for us to hear of God’s great joy when we finally come to our senses, repent, and live lives that are pleasing to God.
- When we come to our senses and come back home to our Heavenly Father, we begin to find life.
- We will study Luke’s version of this parable.

-**Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.** We notice that the tax collectors and sinners were “drawing near to Jesus in order to hear him.” Similarly, we are to draw near to Jesus in order to hear him. We remember that Mary, in the Mary-Martha story, also drew near to Jesus, sat at his feet, and listened to him.

-**And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured/grumbled saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”** This sentence unlocks the meaning of the parable. Jesus portrays two groups of people who were in conflict: the tax collectors/other sinners versus the Pharisees/scribes. We have seen this conflict several times during in the life of Jesus. The Pharisees also grumbled when Jesus ate with Levi, the tax collector (Luke 5:30) and also when Jesus stayed at the home of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector (Luke 19:7).

- **So he told them this parable.** As we have said repeatedly, Jesus’ parables are often classic stories that are immortalized in our memories. This is another one of Jesus’ great stories, stories that he created out of everyday, familiar experiences. Jesus did not create his short homey stories with profound meanings by quoting the Old Testament nor by quoting famous philosophers. Jesus taught the truth about God and the kingdom of God by using familiar, common, everyday experiences such as losing a sheep from the herd or losing a coin in a house.

In today’s world, Jesus may have used the universal American experience of losing our car keys (which are still in the ignition) or misplacing our glasses (which are on the counter under the newspaper). We search intensely, almost frantically, until our car keys or glasses are found. Jesus used similar examples from his everyday life.

-**What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness/desert and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?** That was common sense for a shepherd: a sheep gets lost and the shepherd goes to find the one sheep that has wandered away. Normally, there would be several shepherds caring for a flock of sheep. One shepherd would go out to search for the lost sheep, while the other shepherds would watch the remaining flock. This passage has always been an invitation for the Church to go searching for that person who has become lost from the faith.

### Paintings of Jesus searching for and finding the lost sheep



[The Parable of lost sheep, Alford Usher Soord](#)



[Finding the Lost Sheep, James Tissot](#)

(Click on the painting to enlarge)

-**And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.** Many of us have images in our minds of a painting with a lamb on Jesus’ shoulder. In that painting, Jesus has found the lost lamb, has a smile on his face, and is returning to the rest of the flock. This popular image of Jesus who has a sheep on his shoulders traces its roots to this Bible verse.

This is the *only* verse in the Bible where we find a sheep on Jesus’ shoulders.

We find three references to the word, “joy,” in this short parable, and two more references to joy in the next parable.

There is great joy in the heart of God when anyone who is lost is found.

We remember that Jesus is declared to be the Good Shepherd in the Gospel of John (10:1-18, page 213.) The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, knows the sheep and the sheep know him.

Take a moment and closely examine the following paintings that portray Jesus with a sheep on his shoulders and in his arms.

## Paintings of Jesus the Good Shepherd



[The Good Shepherd](#)



[The Lost Sheep, William Webb](#)



[The Lord is my shepherd, Morgan Weistling](#)

(Enlarge)

Which of these paintings speaks most deeply to you and why?

**-When he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them:** The natural reaction is to share the good news of finding a lost sheep with your friends, family and neighbors. We, who experience good news, want to share the good news with our closest family and friends so they can celebrate with us e.g. the birth of a baby, the finding of a new job, or the purchase of a new home. There is something about good news that it needs to be shared with our closest friends and family.

**-Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.** Circle the word, “rejoice,” and this is the second time this word is used in the story. People in Jesus’ crowd would have known the experience of a shepherd finding a lost sheep, and how much joy that brought to everyone. When the lost sheep is found, there is great joy.

**-Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.** Whoops! Here is a new direction. Here is an unexpected twist of the story. Here is the crux of the problem: the Pharisees and scribes did not know that they themselves were lost.

Even though they were in synagogue every Friday night; even though they tithed and were financially generous to their synagogue; even though they followed the devotional rituals of their religion; the Pharisees were still lost.

The Pharisees were the hypocrites, the “white washed tombs,” who looked good on the outside but inside their hearts, they were filled with jealousy and love of money.

The Pharisees could fool people around them, but they could not fool Jesus or God.

Jesus uses this parable as another invitation for the Pharisees (who are symbolic of self righteous people) to repent and change their (our) ways.

The “lost’ in this parable are not those outside the synagogue but those inside the synagogue.

The “lost” are not the “outsiders” but the “insiders.”

The parable does not focus on a person who wandered away from the church and is considered a “lost soul.” Rather, “the lost” focuses on a self righteous person who is still within the religious community but who doesn’t know that he/she is lost.

When a religiously self-righteous person repents, there is great joy in heaven.

Many denominations convert this parable into an evangelism story that Jesus finds the “lost” who are outside the church. That is, the church is to find the “lost souls” outside the church who do not know Jesus Christ.

But the thrust of this parable is directed to the “insiders” in the synagogue and church. It is directed to those people who do not see their own sinfulness and their own need to be cleansed by the powers of God.

The people “inside” the synagogue or church need to be repent, be cleansed of the crud in their lives, so they can “make contact” with the power and light of God and Jesus.



### Discussion Question:

Why is it often in the church that we think of “the lost” as referring to someone outside the church rather than within?

## #220. The Parable of the Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10

**-Or what woman, having ten silver coins/drachma; if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search diligently until she finds it.** The word, “or,” connects this parable to the previous parable. The two parables are on the same theme.

This is the only time where the word, “drachma,” occurs in the New Testament. Its value was equivalent to a denarius that was worth a day’s wage. See the footnote on page 195 about a drachma.

If you found money that was worth a day of your wages, you would be mighty happy.

The woman sweeps the house and searches diligently until she finds it. In this way, the woman of the house is equivalent to the good shepherd in the previous parable who searches for the lost sheep.

There is a focused diligence as both the woman householder and the good shepherd search for what is precious to them and lost.

**-When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together saying:** A person always wants to share good news with your friends and neighbors. That’s the way it is.

**-Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I lost.** The woman is joyful in her heart that she has found what was lost. So it is with any man or woman who has lost their car keys, their billfold or purse, their tool in the tool shed, etc. This is a universal experience for all of us. This is what makes the parables of Jesus so great: they express a universal experience for all people regardless of century or culture. So it is with God when someone who has lost their senses about God is found.

**-Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.** Jesus is telling us how happy and joyful God is when we finally are found; when we finally come to our senses and return to God and his ways.

Again, the context unlocks the meaning of the parable. This parable was addressed to the Pharisees who did not think that they were lost but actually, they were.

The key word in both parables is “repent.”

We know that these parables are an invitation to repent.

We know that we need to understand what Jesus meant by us repenting and returning to God.

We want to know what it means to repent and the next parable will answer the question.



## Paintings of the parable of the lost coin



[The Parable of the Lost Drachma, Domenico Feti](#)

[The Lost Drachma, James Tissot](#)

### #221. The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

*Read this parable in class.*

- This parable is one of the finest short stories in existence.
- The person who authored this story must have been a literary and oral genius.
- It is time to stop your life, pause, and soak in the scenery of this grand story about the Prodigal Son. Pause at this parable and stay a while. It is as if you are taking a trip to the most beautiful places in the United States and your car stops on the highway that has a panoramic view of the Teton Mountain Range. You don't want to drive past that panoramic view but stop, turn off your car, and stay a while. That is the way it is with this parable of the Prodigal Son.
- The parable of the Prodigal Son may be the finest short story in all of literature just as the Pieta by Michelangelo may be the finest sculpture in all of history.
- Many people feel that the parable of the prodigal son is the priceless pearl of Jesus' parables. It is his finest parable. It is the most valuable story Jesus ever created. Charles Dickens, the great English author, has called it "the greatest story ever told." Some say it is the finest short story in literature. Another poet, Robert Bridges, has judged it as a "flawless piece of art." Small wonder that through the centuries, this story has inspired the pen of Rembrandt, the music of DeBussey, and the poetry of John Masefield.
- George Buttrick, one of the greatest preachers of recent past, said that the story of the prodigal son captures "the essence of the Christian faith."
- This story sums the central message of the *whole* New Testament.
- It is the gospel in a nutshell.
- If you truly understand this story...of the father, the prodigal, and the older brother, you will begin to grasp the central thrust of Jesus and the main emphasis of the New Testament.
- It is important for us to understand the context or setting because the context or setting unlocks the meaning of the parable. It isn't very often that the key is in the context, but the key that unlocks this parable is its setting.
- The parable really begins in Luke 15:1: "Jesus was eating with a group of publicans and sinners. When the Pharisees saw it, they were very upset and said, 'Jesus, why are you eating with this kind of people? They aren't religious enough for you.'"

-Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. In the parables of Jesus, it seems that we often have two sons. The two sons are symbolic of two alternative ways of life. The two sons are symbolic of the "either-or" in life, a fork in the road, a choice between "this road" and "that road," between "this way of life" and "that way of life."

-The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. We have read an incident earlier (Luke 12:13-15) about Jesus being drawn into a family dispute when the younger son wanted his share of the

inheritance and Jesus warned that young man about covetousness and then told a parable about the rich fool and bigger barns. That incident was a historical incident that became a teaching moment for Jesus.

We recall from the teachings in the previous lesson from Luke 12 that the older son received two thirds of the inheritance and the younger son received one third.

The younger son said, "Give me the share of the property that *will* belong to me." We assume that this would have been the property that he would have inherited upon the death of his father.

**-A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.** This son took his inheritance and went down to the first century equivalent of San Francisco and he had a wee of a time. He had so many friends. Of course, he pretended that this money was his own hard earned money and not an inheritance from his father. He had a great time, but finally the money ran out. The friends ran out. The good times ran out, and he ended up in the gutters of San Francisco.

**-When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.** Yes, that is the way it is with life. Desperate times suddenly occur, when we least expect them. A hurricane. A depression. A recession. We didn't see the financial disaster coming and the "nest egg" is gone.

**-So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.** In Biblical says, this is the lowest a Jewish person could ever fall: to eat with pigs that are unkosher animals.

In a modern world, suddenly recessions and depressions hit, and people need to find work of any kind in order to make some money. People can't find jobs and hit the food banks, looking for handouts.

**-But when he came to himself,** This phrase is one of the keys to Jesus' story. This phrase is one of the keys to the story of our lives as well. "To come to yourself" or "to come to your senses" is what repentance means.

Finally, we human beings come to our senses. We finally wake up to what we have been doing wrong. We finally become self-aware to what we have done to help create the mess we are in. We finally wake up and then return to our heavenly Father, our heavenly family and the heavenly ways of loving each other.

To return home to God and his love.

To return home to loving relationships with a loving Father.

To return home to loving people and loving friends.

That is what this story is all about.

It is about when we take our God given inheritance and use it in such a way that we live without God.

This story is not to be narrowly interpreted so that the prodigal son becomes addicted to alcohol or drugs and ends up in jail.

The meaning of this story is much broader than that.

It is about taking our God given inheritance and leaving God and forgetting God, and then we finally come to our senses and return to our heavenly father."

**-he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!"**

**-I will get up and go to my father,** This line is huge. There is that moment in life where we come to an inner conclusion that we need to return home to a relationship with a loving eternal Father who knew us before we were born. We sense that things are messed up in our lives, that things have not gone according to our plans, that we are "out of wack." In our hearts, we slowly come to realize that "It is time to return home to God."

**-and I will say to him,**

**-”Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”** ‘The most important word in that sentence is the word, “Father.” This was and still is Jesus’ primary teaching about God. That God is not some distant deity or some figment of imagination from our wishful thinking. Not, not at all. The Lord God is “our Father,” “My Father,” who knows and loves us from the time before we were born.

When we come back to our heavenly Father, we tell him how we have messed up our life. That we have become so busy spending our inheritance from God that we forgot God. That we jumped on a treadmill called life and have been mighty busy every since, running so fast and forgetting to stop, pause, pray, and sit at the feet and listen to the voice of God, our Father.

These lines in the parable remind us that we again begin talking with God. These words are a reminder that there is a time and place for confession to God of the foolishness of the way we have been living.

**-So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.** As he approached his home, his father had been watching for him every night on the fence, looking down the country road. From a distance, the father saw his son’s walk, his son’s gait, there far in the distance. The father ran to him and threw his arms around him and put a ring on his finger and a coat on his back and shoes on his feet and killed the fatted calf and had a big party for him. The father was so happy that his son who had been lost finally came home.

**-Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.** Again, the key word in that sentence is the word, “Father.” Jesus taught like no other human being on Earth had ever taught when Jesus taught us that the Lord God was our Father.

Jesus, in this moment, taught us about the power of personal and verbal confession to God of our mistakes, foolish choices and imprudent life styles.

**-But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”**

**-And they began to celebrate.**

**-”Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.** Meanwhile, outside, was the older brother, and when he came home and heard all this noise, he said to a servant, ‘What is all the noise? What’s the party about?’ The servant said, ‘Well, your brother has come back home. We thought that he was dead but he is alive.’ The older brother said, ‘I’m not coming into the house to see that good for nothing.’ The older brother stood out there on the porch, pouting away with a stiff upper lip. The father came out to the porch and said, ‘Son, I love you. Everything I have is yours. Come in and see *your brother* for *your brother* who is dead is now alive. He was lost but is now found.’

**-He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on.**

**-He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’**

**-Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.**

**-But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.**

## From a sermon:

The older brother represents those kinds of people who feel that my faults are better than your faults. My sins are better than your sins. My dirt is cleaner than your dirt. Therefore, God must be a little bit more pleased with me than he is with you, you who don't love God so much. ... This brother represents the "unattractive goodness" of so many people who have a good church going, worshipping, Bible studying, praying Christianity. They go to church, love Jesus, read the Bible, and feel that they are a little less sinful than people who live outside the church. They feel that those of us who are here today are a little more righteous and well behaved and well mannered than those who are outside the church. Our dirt is a little bit cleaner than "their" dirt. This story of the older brother represents the unattractive goodness of so many self-righteous Christians who are blind to their own faults. ... I like that phrase, "Lord, make the bad people good, and the good people a little more likeable and pleasant." ... It reminds me of a poem, "We are the choice selected few and all the rest are damned. There is room enough in hell for you, we can't have heaven crammed." There is room enough in hell for you, we can't have heaven crammed. The poem reveals an attitude of smug, religious, self righteousness, that you will be judged by God and I won't be.

I sometimes wonder which of the two brothers was more bitter inside. The younger brother in the gutter of the far country or the older brother who had stayed home and his heart became hard. Hard towards other people. Fault-finding of other people. Who had a sour heart and an acid tongue. His heart judged other people and he was loveless inside. O yes, he may have loved his wife, children, grandchildren and friends, but anyone outside of his circle, he secretly disdained. You wonder which of the two was more miserable. The one in the far country in the gutter or the one who had stayed home and whose heart had become sour and loveless to people outside his circle.

I often wonder, what would have happened if that younger brother would have been coming home, coming closer to the father's house. What would have happened if he had not met the father first but the older brother? What do you think would have happened to the younger if he had been first met by his older brother? Do you think he would have made it into the father's house? I don't think so.

It could be that some of our brothers and sisters in life are kept from Christian congregations by the very fear of encountering so-called good church people. Such people may not return to the church because they fear they will encounter judgmental hearts and faultfinding attitudes. The disease of "faultfindingitis" was found in the elder brother and I am suspicious that it is often found in the church today. Finding faults may keep unchurched people away. When those who have been away from the church for a while come back, you hope that these unchurched people may meet Christians whose hearts are filled with grace. How unfortunate if they ran into someone with a judging heart.

So, basically, we have two brothers. We have one brother who is the prodigal of the flesh and the other is a prodigal of the spirit. Both are loved. Both are loved deeply by God, the father.

**-But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!**

**-Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.**

**-But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'** "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who comes to his senses and returns to God and God's ways, than over self righteous people whose hearts are still hard towards God and others in need.

The Pharisees who were symbolic of the older brother who erroneously thought he was morally and spiritually superior in comparison with the younger brother.

Basically, we have one brother who was a prodigal of the flesh and the other brother was a prodigal of the spirit.

Both were loved deeply by their Father.

## A sermon about The Prodigal Son:

 [http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_the\\_prodigal\\_son.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_the_prodigal_son.htm)

### Paintings of the progression of the story of the Prodigal Son

#### Leaving his home with his inheritance

 [The Departure, James Tissot](#)

#### In the far country

 [The Prodigal son, Jan Sanders van Hemessen](#)

#### At “the bottom” with the pigs and “coming to his senses”

 [The Prodigal Son, John Macallan Swan](#)

 [The Prodigal, Auguste Rodin](#)

#### Returning home to his father

 [Forgiving Father, Frank Wesley](#)

 [Prodigal Son, Father Welcomes the Son,](#)

 [The Return of the prodigal son, Harmenzoon van Rijn Rembrandt](#)

 [Detail, Prodigal Son and Father, Rembrandt](#)

 [The Prodigal Son in the Arms of His Father, Gustave Dore](#)

#### New robe, new ring, new sandals

 [Return of the Prodigal, Guercino](#)

Which of these paintings speaks most deeply to you and why?

There were very few paintings of the scene with the “older brother.”  
Those few paintings were not very engaging.



## Discussion Question:

What do you think are the most important truths that Jesus was teaching through the parable of the prodigal son?

### • *Closing Prayers*

#### **Assigned Readings for Session 34: Uniquely Luke (5) Journey to Jerusalem**

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Day 1 #222-225 | Unjust Steward, Faithfulness With Least, Two Masters, Pharisees |
| Day 2 #226-227 | Concerning the Law, Concerning Divorce (Only Luke)              |
| Day 3 #228     | The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus                         |
| Day 4 #229-231 | Warning Against Offenses, On Forgiveness, On Faith (Only Luke)  |
| Day 5 #232-233 | We are Unprofitable Servants, Cleansing of the Ten Lepers       |
| Day 6 #234-235 | Coming of Kingdom of God, Day of the Son of Man (Only Luke)     |
| Day 7 #236-237 | The Parable of the Unjust Judge, The Pharisee and the Publican  |

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