

# ‘Lost’

‘Three lost things.’<sup>1</sup> We must....note that these three parables are not simply three ways of stating the same thing. There is a difference. The sheep went lost through sheer foolishness [and through ignorance]. It did not think, and many a man would escape sin if he thought in time. The coin [of its own ‘volition’] did not get lost at all; it was lost through no fault of its own. Many a man is led astray, and God will not hold him guiltless who has taught another to sin. The son deliberately went lost, callously turning his back on his father [as a premeditated, wilful act, but with mitigating circumstances]. But the love of God can defeat the foolishness of man, the seductions of the tempting voices, and even the deliberate rebellion of the heart.<sup>2</sup>

In ancient times, in the Near East, it was by no means unusual for a father to divide his substance between his sons well before his death. In short, he retired from working the land, and passed on his goods to his heirs to work, but formal, legal title did not pass until the death of the testator. The heirs, in turn, had to work the land, and maintain and support their father, providing for all his needs. Only on his death would title pass.

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<sup>1</sup> concerning this tripartite parable, there is one key aspect which many have failed to grasp: each of the core players—the shepherd, the woman, and the father—are not immortal or divine beings, they are mortals, or are composed of mortals, thus: the lost sheep, Luke 15:1-7 (one in an hundred, illustrative of the effort made by the ‘elect’ or similar leader or overseer to save the individual, and contrast with John 10:11-16, where Christ says, ‘*I am the good shepherd*,’ v.11a, Who defends and protects His flock and lays down His life for His sheep. There is a difference. The former is a shepherd’s search for a wandering sheep as part of the Great Commission given to the church, Mat 28:18-20, and as found counterpoised in the ‘*foolish [or ‘iniquitous,’ v.17a, Hebrew: alil] shepherd*’ of Zech 11:15-17, ‘*which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one,*’ etc. v.16b; the latter is Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who did lay down His life for His flock); the lost coin, Luke 15:8-10 (one in ten, standing, as the woman, for the church, and ten for the seven church eras plus the three years of Christ’s ministry, q.v. sup., illustrative of the effort made to save the lost church, or, better, those of worth in a lost church era, for the silver is indicative of the refined product still to be found in the lost era, while that era, as a whole, will lose its golden candlestick, q.v. Rev 2:5d and parable of the ten virgins, sup.); and the prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32 (one of two, of the brothers, illustrative of the effort made to save the lost of the progeny of Abraham, the lost of Israel). In this there is a cadence: one hundredth, the individual lost and found; one tenth, the church era people lost and found; one half, the progeny of Abraham lost and found, for the inheritance was given to Abraham and his seed, Luke 1:55b, ‘*to Abraham and his seed forever*’; Gal 3:16a, ‘*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made*’; also cf. I Chron 16:17,18; Psa 69:36; Isa 65:9, et al.

<sup>2</sup> Orthodox Judaism, strangely, alights on this parable, claiming that it is evidence of the superiority faithfulness of Judaism (the faithful son) over Christianity (the prodigal son). The parable simply will not support the contention. The faithful son, despite taking umbrage over how his brother was treated by his father on his return, was just that, faithful, which Pharaseeism / Judaism has not been, being singularly unfaithful to the Father and His Law, and utterly mired in occultism. Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, standing for the Jews, is excoriated in Ezekiel chpt. 23, being described as worse (Ezek 23:11) than her whoring sister, Samaria, the capital of Israel, standing for the so-called ‘lost tribes’ (Ahilobah and Aholah respectively). Fatally to the Jewish contention, the younger is Aholibah, Ezek 23:4a, not Aholah, whereas the Jews regard Christianity as the younger, not the elder. Also, Jer 3:11b, ‘*backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah,*’ gives God’s judgement on Judah’s calamitous performance. In reality, of course, Judæo-Christianity is not the younger, for it, and it alone, is the continuous line from Abraham, the real father in the parable, through the Old Covenant, then through Christ, and into His kingdom in the Millennium, bringing in the New Covenant, fulfilling at the end in the new heavens and the new earth, with God the Father coming to reside with His Son and His own, forevermore, q.v. sup.

Being the younger son of two, the 'prodigal' would receive one third of the estate. That he begged for, and that he promptly '*realized*,'<sup>3</sup> that is, sold for money. He then departed, to squander the entire on riotous living and false friends. In doing so, he sinned against his father, and God, in a number of ways, for he:

1. Clamoured for ownership in what he did not have a right to own;
2. Destroyed the integrity of his father's lifetime's work by squandering his share of the estate;
3. Did so before his father's eyes;
4. Failed to consider his father's feelings, causing him heartfelt grief;
5. Failed to consider and act upon what his father wanted;
6. Failed to provide for and maintain his father;
7. Brought shame upon the family in the eyes of others;
8. Succumbed to insensitivity and arrogance;
9. Succumbed to greed and avarice;
10. Succumbed to selfishness;
11. Gave in to weakness, seeking the false praise of strangers;
12. Lived a hedonistic life utterly divorced from God's Law;
13. Failed to honour his father; and,
14. Failed to honour God.

But then, after the inevitable collapse, in the very pit of destitution, '*he came to himself*.'<sup>4</sup> In other words, he came to his senses, and resolved to return to his father and ask for forgiveness, seeking nothing better than the status of a hired servant (the implication here was that theretofore he had not '*been himself*'). On return to his father, however, he was welcomed back into the family, as a son, not as a hired servant. But it should not be forgotten that he had squandered his inheritance, before it was due him. The father confirms this in his

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 15:13

<sup>4</sup> Luke 15:17

response to his elder son: '*Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*'<sup>5</sup> Often, the importance of this is overlooked. Certainly, the [younger] son, on repentance and seeking forgiveness, was forgiven by his father. But he had taken his 'share' improperly, misused it dreadfully, and, importantly, was not invested with another inheritance! His heritable rights had been squandered and lost. His standing in the family was greatly diminished. He was a son, but a son no longer with an inheritance, his heritable right to the estate of his father.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, is to be taken from this?

The first point is that wilful sin—for the prodigal did plan it beforehand—is forgivable if the person is '*not himself.*' In Judæo-Christianity, that corresponds to a person's state 'before baptism.' After baptism, that relaxation ceases, other than in the case of immediate repentance,<sup>7</sup> and then there has to be restitution under the Law, if against man, and complete repentance, if against God, the penalty for the sinner's sin, substitutionary death, already having been suffered by Jesus Christ. In this context, the slaying of the '*fatted calf*' in a way can be taken as symbolical of blood sacrifice.

Secondly, and crucially, the wilfully sinful life that we have lived before repentance does impact on what happens later if then we wilfully disregard God, walking away from him and using all his manifold gifts for our own selfish pleasure. If we do that, even on repentance and being welcomed back, there is a very substantial loss compared to the status of those who do not do so.

So what is the difference, in terms of inheritance in the kingdom of God? What exactly is the loss? It is simply this: the purpose of a man's life is to '*inherit the kingdom of God.*'<sup>8</sup> But that is an inheritance with distinct rankings, and all should strive for the highest mark: the 'elect' of God. The best will inherit the highest status in the kingdom, that of the cherubim (with two attaining the highest rank of archangel).<sup>9</sup> Those of lesser standing will be ranked with the angels. The true inheritance of man is that of the status of crowned cherubim. Having squandered his material gifts, then returning in remorse, repentant, availed the prodigal much, but it did not avail him everything. There was loss, and a very substantial one, for the prodigal was forgiven and accepted back into the family, but without a renewed share in the family inheritance. The loss to the backsliding Christian is that of the high standing in the kingdom: '*a better resurrection,*' '*and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection*';<sup>10</sup> and, '*this is the first resurrection.*'<sup>11</sup> Man's purpose and goal is to be part of that '*first resurrection,*' the resurrection to be crowned cherubim in the kingdom of God. Nothing else remotely compares!

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 15:31b

<sup>6</sup> Barclay, William, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp.206-214 (with added comment and clarification in square brackets)

<sup>7</sup> q.v. sup.

<sup>8</sup> cf. I Cor 6:9-11, as an immortal being, I Cor 15:40-54; John 3:36 (with added comment and clarification in square brackets), '*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not [Greek: apeithon, 'disobedient,' 'rejecteth'] the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*'

<sup>9</sup> q.v. sup.

<sup>10</sup> Heb 11:35b

<sup>11</sup> Rev 20:5b

For the Judæo-Christian, the particular interest lies in this third parable, and its implications for the forgiveness of sin. At first reading, it might seem that, upon repentance, all sin is forgivable and forgiven, regardless of its nature, but that is a final step which the detail of the parable does not support.

Judæo-Christianity founds the doctrine of forgiveness of sin on the provisions for forgiveness found in the Scriptures. Of particular importance in this context is the issue of forgiveness, or the lack of it, of wilful sin. It will be recalled that in the ritual sacrificial system, a system of substitution, there were prescribed sacrifices for:

1. Sins of ignorance;
2. Sins of weakness;
3. Sins of omission;
4. Sins of forgetfulness; and,
5. Sins of inadvertence,

but there was no prescribed sacrifice for unrepented wilful sin (that is, premeditated in the full knowledge of the penalty), and repeated wilful sin.

The coming of Christ and the general availability of the Holy Spirit opened up the general availability of access to the kingdom of God for mankind, subject to repentance and obedience to His word. That made wilful sin capable of being forgiven, but only on and after baptism. Strangely, this parallels the ritual position, and does not conflict with it, for the ritual sacrifices were given to God's people, the Israelites, and that nation was a forerunner of the church. Once inside the church—which some term 'spiritual Israel'—that is, baptised and inside, there is no forgiveness of wilful sin committed after baptism, other than when realized and immediately and completely repented of, and, crucially, in circumstances where some element of weakness or ignorance were in play when the sin was committed.