

The Mission of Jesus



SABBATH—MAY 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Luke 15:4–7, 11–32; Luke 16:19–31; Luke 18:35–43; Luke 19:1–10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘The Son of Man came to look for the lost and save them’ ” (Luke 19:10, NlrV).

IF WE WERE TO WRITE A MISSION STATEMENT FOR JESUS, WE COULD NOT DO ANY BETTER THAN TO REPEAT HIS OWN WORDS: “ ‘To look for the lost and save them’ ” (Luke 19:10, NlrV).

What was lost? It was humanity (all people) that was separated from God. It was doomed to die and filled with fear, disappointment, and hopelessness. If nothing were done for it, all would be lost.

But, thanks to Jesus, we all have great reasons to be hopeful.

“In the fall, man separated himself from God. Earth was cut off from heaven. Across the gulf that lay between, there could be no connection with God. But through Christ, earth is again connected with heaven. By His own doing, Christ has bridged the separation which sin had made. . . . Christ connects fallen man in his weakness and helplessness with God’s power.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 20.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a story of God’s search for lost humanity. Luke shows this truth by using three important parables:¹ the lost sheep (Luke 15:4–7), the lost coin (verses 8–10), and the lost son (verses 11–32).

DEFINITIONS

1. parables—very short stories that teach a spiritual lesson or truth.

THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST COIN (Luke 15:4–7)

Read Luke 15:4–7. What does this tell us about God’s love for us? Why is it so important to understand that it was the shepherd who went looking for the lost sheep?



God loves us so much that He Himself will come looking for us so that He can bring us back to Him.



The lost coin carries the likeness of the ruler just as we still carry, in our souls, part of the likeness of God.

The world can appear uncaring and indifferent to us. But this parable shows an amazing truth: God loves us so much that He Himself will come looking for us, so that He can bring us back to Him.

“The soul that has given himself to Christ is more valuable in His sight than the whole world. Jesus would have passed through the suffering of Calvary so that just one person might be saved in His kingdom. He will never desert [leave behind] even one person for whom He has died. If His followers choose to follow Him, He will hold them tightly.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 483.

Read Luke 15:8, 9. This parable is found only in Luke. The lost coin could have one of two meanings. First, Judea during the time of Jesus was full of poor people. In most homes one coin (*drachma*) could have been more than a day’s wage, just enough to keep the family from starving. Second, as a sign of being married, some women wore a headdress made up of ten coins—a large sum, saved over a long time in the case of poor families.

In either case, the loss was a serious thing. So, the woman turns the house upside down until she finds that coin. Her soul is filled with great joy, and the joy spreads to all her friends.

“The coin is lying among dust but is still a piece of silver or gold. Its owner looks for it because it is of value. So, every soul may be stained by sin but is still considered of value by God. The face and the words of the ruler are found on the coin. In the same way, man at his creation was made in the likeness of God and was brought to life by the power of His Word. Yes, we live in a world that is dim through the influence of sin. But every person still carries some likeness to the Creator within his or her soul.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 194.

So much modern science and philosophy tells us that we are nothing but “accidents” in a meaningless universe. And this universe does not care at all about our future or us. What completely different picture is given in these two parables?

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON: PART 1 (Luke 15:13–16)

Told only by Luke, the parable is praised in history as the most beautiful short story ever told on the forgiving nature of love. This parable about the prodigal (wandering; wasteful) son (Luke 15:11–32) may well be called the parable of the loving father and two lost sons. One son chose the wild life of the far-off land over the love of the father. The other son chose to stay at home but did not fully know the love of the father. He also does not understand the meaning of being a brother. The parable may be studied in seven parts—four dealing with the prodigal, two with the father, and one with the elder brother.

1. *“Give me” (Luke 15:12).* The younger son’s decision to ask his father for his part of the property was not a quick one. Sin often results after a long time of wondering about the wrong things in life. The younger son must have heard from friends about the “good” things in far-off lands. Life at home was too strict. Love was there, but it had its own limits. The far-off land offered him life without rules. The father was too protective, and his love was too “much.” The son wanted freedom, and in the search for freedom was the seed of rebellion (turning away from) his father.

2. *“Why me?” (Luke 15:13–16).* The son cashed in his entire share and set off to the “far country.” The far country is a place far away from the father’s home. Love’s caring eyes and the law’s protective fence are not known in the far country. It is a far-off land of “riotous [wild] living” (Luke 15:13). Such pleasures of godless living destroyed his health and wealth, and soon he became moneyless, friendless, and foodless. His “glorious [amazing]” life ended up in a drain. Starved and poor, he found work in caring for the pigs.

3. *“Make me” (Luke 15:17–19).* But even the young man is still a son, with the power of choice to turn around. So, the son “‘came to his senses.’” He remembered a place called home, a person known as father, and a bond called love. He walked back home, with a speech in his hand, to beg of the father: “‘Make me.’” That is, let me be whatever you want. But let me be within your watchful eyes, within the care of your love. What better home is there but the Father’s heart?

The world can appear very attractive and tempting. What things of the world tempt² you to think, “Oh, that is not so bad,” but deep down you know it is?



What better home is there but the Father’s heart?

DEFINITIONS

2. tempt—led into feeling a desire to sin.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON: PART 2 (Luke 15:17–20)



Over every repentant son
there is joy in heaven.

DEFINITIONS

3. repentance—feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

4. contrition—feeling a deep sense of unworthiness for all God has done for us.

4. *The return home (Luke 15:17–20).* The son's return was a journey of repentance.³ This drove him to “arise” and “go” to his father. The prodigal (wandering) son returns home with a four-part speech that shows the true meaning of repentance.

First, there is an *admission (recognition)* of the father as “‘my father’ ” (verse 18). The prodigal son now needs to depend upon and trust his father's love and forgiveness, just as we must learn to trust in our heavenly Father's love and forgiveness.

Second, *confession*: what the prodigal did is not just a mistake, but a sin against God and his father (verse 18).

Third, *contrition*:⁴ “‘I am no longer worthy’ ” (verse 19). He understands his own unworthiness in comparison with the worthiness of God.

Fourth, *petition (asking; prayer request)*: “‘Make me’ ” (verse 19). Surrender to whatever God wills is the sign of repentance. The son has come home.

5. *The waiting father (Luke 15:20, 21).* The wait and the watch, the grief and the hope began as soon as the prodigal son stepped out of the home. The wait was over when the father saw him “‘a great way off,’ ” and then “‘had compassion [mercy], and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him’ ” (verse 20, NKJV). No other picture captures the character (thoughts; feelings; actions) of God as that of the waiting father.

6. *The joyful family (Luke 15:22–25).* The father hugged the son, clothed him with a new robe, put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and ordered a feast. The family was in celebration. Suppose leaving the home was death. Then the return was a resurrection (return to life). So, it was worthy of celebration. The son was really a prodigal (wasteful person), but still a son. So, over every repentant son there is joy in heaven (verse 7).

7. *The elder son (Luke 15:25–32).* The father's last word with his elder son shows Heaven's attitude to all sorrowful sinners: “‘It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found’ ” (Luke 15:32, NKJV).

Put yourself in the older brother's shoes. His thinking may be wrong, but why does it make so much sense that he would feel that way? How does this story show ways in which the gospel asks us to do things that may not “make sense” to the world?

LOST OPPORTUNITIES (CHANCES) (Luke 16:19–31)

Jesus came to look for and save those lost in sin. But He never forces anyone to accept the salvation He offers. Salvation is free and available to all. But one must accept the free offer in faith, which leads to a life in obedience to God's will. The only time we have for such an experience is while we live on earth. There is no other opportunity.

Read Luke 16:19–31. What is the important message of this parable?

The parable is written only in Luke. And it teaches two great truths about salvation: (1) the importance of “today” in being saved and (2) the absence of another opportunity (chance) for salvation after death.

Today is the day of salvation. The parable does not teach that there is something very evil in riches or something very good in being poor. What it does teach is that the opportunity of being saved and living a saved life must not be missed while we are still alive on this earth. Rich or poor, educated or not educated, powerful or powerless, we have no second chance. All are saved and judged by their attitude (feeling) today, now, to Jesus. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2, NKJV).

The parable also teaches that eternal reward has nothing to do with owning things on earth. The rich man was “ ‘dressed in purple cloth and fine linen. He lived an easy life every day’ ” (Luke 16:19, NIV). But he missed the most important part of life: God. Where God is not recognized, fellow humans are not noticed. The rich man's sin was not in his richness. Instead, it was in his failure to recognize that God's family is broader (wider) than he was prepared to accept.

There is no second chance for salvation after death. The second truth is that there is no second chance for salvation after death. “People have to die once. After that, God will judge them” (Hebrews 9:27, NIV). Another point of this parable is to show people that we have been given enough proof now to be aware of making a choice for or against God. Any study of religion that teaches some kind of “second chance” after death is a big lie.

We love to talk about how much God loves us and all that He has done and is doing to save us. But what should this parable teach us about the danger of not taking God's love and offer of salvation seriously?

WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE (Luke 18:35–43)

The mission statement of Jesus is that He came to look for and save that which was lost. He came to make men and women whole. Luke gives us two examples that show how Jesus restored two broken men into wholeness. One was blind physically, the other spiritually. Both were not popular with society.

Read Luke 18:35–43. What does this passage teach about our full dependence upon God? Who among us at times has not cried out, “Have mercy on me”?

Mark names the man as Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46). He was a beggar outside of Jericho. He was handicapped, poor, and unaccepted by society. But he suddenly found himself in the sweep of heaven’s wonder. “Jesus of Nazareth was passing by” (Luke 18:37, NKJV), and his faith rose upward to cry out, “ ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ” (verse 39, NKJV). Faith does not require eyes nor ears, feet nor hands, but only a heart that connects to the Creator of the world.

Read Luke 19:1–10. Who was the “blind” man in this story?

Only Luke tells of the story of Zacchaeus, the last of Jesus’ many experiences with unpopular people. Christ’s mission, to look for and save that which was lost, was gloriously (with great power) fulfilled in this experience with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was Jericho’s chief tax collector. The Pharisees in that city considered Zacchaeus to be a chief sinner. But he was a chief sinner sought and saved by the Savior. What strange places and methods Jesus used in His mission: a sycamore tree, a curious man trying to see who Jesus was, and a loving Lord commanding the man to come down. Jesus had a self-invited lunch appointment with Zacchaeus. But more important, Jesus had a message to make: “ ‘Today salvation has come to this house’ ” (Luke 19:9, NKJV). But only if Zacchaeus first made things right (verse 8).

It is easy to see other people’s faults and weaknesses. But we can so often be blind to our own. What are some areas in your life that you need to face up to, confess, and get the victory over what you have been putting off for a long time?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “By the lost sheep Christ means both the individual sinner and the one world that has fallen out of the way and has been ruined by sin.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 190.

On the value of one soul: “Who can judge the value of a soul? To know its worth, go to Gethsemane and watch with Christ through those hours of suffering. Watch Him sweat as it were great drops of blood. Look upon the Savior uplifted on the cross. . . . At the foot of the cross, remember that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life. Then you may judge the value of a soul.”—Adapted from *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 196.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① All religions describe the human person in search of God. But Christianity pictures God as the one who does the searching: Adam, where are you (Genesis 3:9)? Cain, where is your brother (Genesis 4:9)? Elijah, what are you doing here (1 Kings 19:9)? Zacchaeus, come down (Luke 19:5). What has been your own experience with God’s looking for you?
- ② Look again at the final question at the end of Tuesday’s study. What was the serious mistake that the older son made? What spiritual weaknesses were shown in his attitude (feeling)? Why is it easier to have that same attitude than we might think? Read also Matthew 20:1–16.
- ③ In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said that even if someone were to come back from the dead, there would be those who would not believe. In what ways did this parable foretell how some people felt about the resurrection of Jesus? For example, some still did not believe, even though there was powerful proof of His resurrection.
- ④ One of the most impressive parts of Jesus’ saving ministry (work done for God) is that He treated all people equally: for example, the blind beggar, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, and the Samaritan woman. The Cross, more than anything else, shows that all people are equal in God’s eyes. How should this important truth influence how we treat others?
- ⑤ Compare the story of the prodigal son with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. How do the two balance each other out?