

# LUKE

## Chapter 15

### *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*

**Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” 3 So he told them this parable: 4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 7 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.**

Luke 15 is a high point in the travel narrative and in the entire gospel. Called “The Gospel of the Outcast” and the “The Gospel for the Outcast,” Luke 15 “is so distinctive of the Lucan portrait of Jesus” as to be called “The Heart of the Third Gospel.” It is closely connected to the table talk and discourse on discipleship in Luke 14; Jesus is looking for those who have ears to hear his catechesis (14:35). The entirety of chapter 15 both is directed at the Pharisees and is also a fundamental part of the catechesis for the disciples and the crowds (and the tax collectors and sinners). The structure of the chapter is simple: an introduction (15:1–3) and three parables, one about a lost sheep (15:4–7), one about a lost coin (15:8–10), and one about a lost son (15:11–32). (CC p. 586)

Luke’s introduction to these three parables signals to his hearer that this chapter must be heard in view of what Jesus has been teaching in the previous two chapters. Table fellowship language dominates both Luke 13 and 14. Table fellowship continues to be the context here in Luke 15. And because God’s table fellowship is at issue, the eschatological themes of end-time banquet and communion or rejection begun in Luke 13 and 14 also continue to be in the picture here. (CC p. 586)

Luke’s framework is simple. In fact, he seems unconcerned with time or place and concerned only with persons.

From 13:31–35 to the moment when Jesus reaches Jerusalem, time seems to be an insignificant factor for Luke. There are no more Sabbath references or any other time markers. The last reference to place was in the previous passage where Jesus is clearly journeying to his Jerusalem destiny (14:25). The teachings in Luke 14–16 are given while on the way to Jerusalem. (See comments at 13:31–35 about the time and locale for Jesus’ teaching from 13:32 to 19:27.) (CC p. 586)

It is important that these parables be heard as spoken by Jesus as he journeys swiftly to his destination in Jerusalem and his exodus (9:31) at Calvary. (CC p. 586)

Both the tax collectors/sinners and the Pharisees/scribes heard these three parables. Jesus wants each group to hear these parables and see themselves in them, for the parables illustrate that the nature of the kingdom is joyous feasting with God. The illustration culminates in the parable of the two sons, the prodigal son and his elder brother, where the kingdom is a feast for sinners

prepared by the Father himself. The elder son draws near (ἤγγισεν; 15:25) and hears the music and dancing of the messianic feast prepared for the prodigal son who has repented. The elder brother is not like the sinners and tax collectors but like the Pharisees, who do not recognize the kingdom when they see it. In both cases, ἐγγίζω, “draw near,” is used for those who approach the kingdom that has come in Jesus: in 15:2, the tax collectors and sinners draw near to Jesus, who receives them, eats with them, and tells them a parable about rejoicing at the eschatological feast; in 15:25, the brother of the prodigal son draws near to the feast only to be scandalized and to reject the eschatological meal, joy, and witness of his father—a reaction similar to the Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus. Thus Jesus addresses Pharisees/scribes and tax collectors/sinners simultaneously. His comforting revelation of the way of the kingdom is also a loving admonition to the scandalized to join the celebration through repentance. It is necessary correctly to discern the addressees in order to understand properly the point revealed. (CC pp. 587-588)

Three parables about finding what was lost illustrate human weakness and the strength of God’s care. (TLSB)

**15:1** *tax collectors and “sinners.* Taxes were collected for the Roman government by Jewish agents, who were especially detested for helping the pagan conqueror and for frequently defrauding their own people); Mk 2:15 (Sinners were notoriously evil people as well as those who either refused or lacked the time to follow the Mosaic law as interpreted by the teachers of the law. The term was commonly used to tax collectors, adulterers, robbers and the like.

These were despised and cast out of the synagogues by the church leaders of their time. They were also not permitted to associate on a plane of equality with the Jews in good standing. (Kretzmann)

There were ranks among the people of that day: (Stuenkel)

- Priests and Sadducees
- Scribes and Pharisees
- Rural People
- Publicans & Sinners
- Slaves

*drawing near* – eggisontes – They kept coming. It was as though there was a sucking power that Jesus had. – Magnet & filings – Sun/wind – Honey/vinegar – Gospel

ἐγγίζοντες—Luke uses ἐγγίζω eighteen times in his gospel and six times in Acts. In comparison, Matthew has seven occurrences, Mark three, and John none. This word often carries with it an eschatological dimension (cf. H. Preisker, ἐγγύς, TDNT 2:331), and in Luke it emphasizes the nearness (secret presence) of the kingdom in Jesus, revealed in miracles or table fellowship. (Most significant are Lk 7:12; 10:9, 11; 15:1; 18:35, 40; 21:8, 20, 28, 30, 31; 24:15, 28; see also Lk 12:33; 15:25; 19:11, 29, 37, 41; 22:1, 47) See A. A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast*, 60–63, 125, 220–21. In Acts, an eschatological connection is present in ἐγγύς (Acts 1:12) and ἐγγίζω (Acts 7:17; 9:3; 22:6). Compare the phrase “The kingdom of God/of heaven has come near” (Mt 3:2; etc.), which uses the same verb. (CC p. 584)

*to hear him* – ἀκούειν—This is an infinitive of purpose, “in order to hear him.” On ἀκούω as a technical term for catechumens, see comments at 5:1; the Sermon on the Plain (6:27, 47, 49); the parable of the sower (8:8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18); and Jesus’ discussion of the new kinship (8:21). The tax collectors and sinners wanted to become hearers of the Word. (CC p. 584)

But Luke is most certainly concerned about the persons, and for these parables the audience is critical. Luke begins by telling us that the tax collectors and sinners are drawing near (ἐγγίζοντες; 15:1). The hearer would understand from Luke's gospel that these are "the poor, the disabled, the lame, the blind" (14:13, 21). The reason the tax collectors and sinners come to Jesus is "in order to hear him" (15:1), a response to Jesus' final admonition at the end of the previous chapter: "The one having ears to hear, let him hear" (14:35). (CC p. 587)

As was noted in commenting on the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, hearers of the Word are catechumens. These tax collectors/sinners want to become Jesus' catechumens—his disciples, or learners of the Word. This certainly is a sign of their repentance, a major theme of the next three parables. (CC p. 587)

**15:2** *grumbled*. Complained among themselves, but not openly. (CSB)

It meant that they started a dirty rumor about Jesus. "He is bringing disgrace upon the whole business of Rabbinic work." (Stuenkel)

διεγόγγυζον—The imperfect suggests customary, continuous action, i.e., they began to grumble again, as was their wont. The Pharisees grumble also at 5:30 in reaction to Jesus' eating with Levi and in 19:7 when Jesus stays at the home of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. (See A. A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast*, 134.) Note also the assonance in ἐγγίζοντες ... διεγόγγυζον. (CC pp. 584-585)

Luke continues by introducing the Pharisees and scribes who are "grumbling" that "this man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (15:2), summing up Jesus' table fellowship ministry. This "grumbling" imitates the behavior of the Israelites in the desert. They saw the signs of God's presence but did not believe. (E.g., Ex 15:24; 16:2, 7-8; 17:3; Num 11:1; 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11, 41; 17:5; Deut 1:27; cf. 1 Cor 10:10) Scribes are leaders of the Pharisees, and the Pharisaic party may be beginning to formulate charges against Jesus that would involve his table fellowship with sinners. (CC p.587)

See the excursus "The Opponents of Jesus in Luke." Table fellowship with sinners was a serious offense against the Pharisees' table fellowship laws, and they are certainly aware from Jesus' previous behavior at the table that his view of table fellowship is radically different from theirs (see the excursus "Jesus' Table Fellowship"). (CC p. 587)

*eats with them*. More than simple association, eating with a person indicated acceptance and recognition (cf. Ac 11:3; 1 Co 5:11; Gal 2:12). (CSB)

προσδέχεται καὶ συνεσθίει—These two present tense verbs indicate that Jesus' activity is ongoing and habitual, i.e., it is his pattern to welcome sinners and eat with them. See 5:30 and comments at 7:34 on the penalty Jesus could receive for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners according to Deut 21:22-23. (CC p. 585)

**15:3-7** The lost sheep represents the sinner, while God, especially the Son, is the shepherd (cf Ps 23; Is 40:11). The found sheep is every Christian, rescued and delivered by God. The neighbors are the saints and angels who rejoice together. (TLSB)

**15:3** *this parable*. Jesus responded with a story that contrasted the love of God with the exclusiveness of the Pharisees. (CSB)

ἔπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην λέγων—This introduction is similar to that of the parable in Lk 5:36, which also has similar thematic components (see comments below). The antecedent here for αὐτοὺς is both the tax collectors/sinners and the Pharisees/scribes. (CC p. 585)

**15:4** *one of them* – The shepherds were referred to in this verse were those people the Pharisees would hire but they would not consider being a shepherd. They were above that. (Stuenkel)

Listening to Jesus, the tax collectors/sinners and (especially) the Pharisees/scribes would feel invited to imagine that they are like a shepherd who has lost a sheep. As the Pharisees (in particular) hear this parable, they might be offended by being referred to as “shepherds” and also by being accused of “losing” one of those for whom they are responsible.

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 147, notes that even though shepherds are highly esteemed figures in the OT (e.g., Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34), they engaged in a despised trade at the time of Jesus and were considered unclean and sinners (part of the *‘am—ha’arets*, the “people of the land,” the commoners). He also points out that the shepherd “lost” the sheep, i.e., that ἀπολέσας, “having lost” (15:4), is (surprisingly?) an *active* aorist participle, not a passive one, suggesting that the shepherd is responsible for the loss of the sheep (p. 149). (CC p. 588)

This reiterates what Jesus has already accused them of in his woes and his final accusation against them: “Woe to you lawyers, because you took away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter in, and those entering in you prevented” (11:52; cf. “scribes and Pharisees” in 11:53). (CC p. 588)

*lost one of them.* The shepherd theme was familiar from Ps 23; Isa 40:11; Eze 34:11–16. (CSB)

In their office as religious leaders, “shepherds” of the people, the Pharisees and scribes might indeed hear Jesus calling them to imitate him, that is, to be shepherds who journey to seek the lost one. That is what Jesus is doing and that is what they grumble at; it is the nub of the conflict. And so the shepherd’s work to journey, seek, rescue, and restore the lost sheep is given careful description and a central position. (CC pp. 588-589)

*in open country* – Their normal pasture. The emphasis is not on neglecting the flock, but on seeking the lost. (A shepherd typically watched 3-40 sheep, so Jesus’ account likely implies the presence of one or two helpers. (TLSB)

ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ—On the desert, see comments at 4:1. This is the last occurrence of ἔρημος in Luke. (It is in Lk 1:80; 3:2, 4; 4:1, 42; 5:16; 7:24; 8:29; 9:12) (R. Stein, *Luke*, 403, notes that “most shepherding was done on ‘desert mountains’ east of Bethlehem.”) (CC p. 585)

The sheep is lost in the wilderness. Normal Palestinian practice would include more than one shepherd to watch the sheep, and if one were lost *while they are in the wilderness*, one shepherd would go out to look for the lost sheep and the other(s) would take care of the ninety-nine. They would not be abandoned but would be watched over by others. (CC p. 589)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 149, suggests that these are “peasant” shepherds who would bring the sheep back to the village at night, and not “roving tribesman” who would keep their flocks in the field at night. (CC p. 589)

*go after the one* – This meant going into ravines in stormy weather and taking risks. (Stuenkel)

So, then, the shepherd responsible for finding the lost sheep goes out into the wilderness and finds it huddled and incapable of movement. (CC p. 589)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 148, cites C. Stuhlmueller, “The Gospel according to Luke,” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971) 148: “A lost sheep will lie down helplessly and refuse to budge. The shepherd is forced to carry it over a long distance.” (CC p. 589)

The following excerpts from the July 31, 1985 Ft. Wayne News-Sentinel illustrate well what can go into a search. “Out of desperation, Pamela and Neal Jordon and five of their children went to a carnival Friday. The purpose of their visit was anything but fun. Someone called the police and said ‘they though they saw Crissie with the carnival when it left Ft. Wayne’...Crystal Jordon, 16, has been missing since July 17...The Jordans have seven children, ages 3 to 18...’We went up there out of desperation,’ said Mrs. Jordon of her trip to Goshen. ‘We’re pretty desperate to hear from her; we’re scared to death. When it rained the other night, all I could think about was how I hoped she wasn’t out there. I hoped she was staying dry...Just not knowing where she’s at, not knowing if she’s okay...is she sick? Is she hungry? Is she crying? This is what eats at me.’”(Note – Crystal was found save and sound)

**15:5** *on his shoulders* – At that time the sheep’s feet were tied together in front of the shepherd’s neck. The bottom of the sheep was against the back of the shepherd’s neck. This was done because it was presumed that the sheep was exhausted and so the only way the sheep could get lost was if the shepherd got lost. (Stuenkel)

The lost sheep is carried home in safety with triumph and celebration. Shepherds often brought the flock home to the village at the end of the day, though not always (cf 2:8). (TLSB)

He must carry it back to the village, yet he rejoices. This simple description of the shepherd hoisting the sheep onto his shoulders, rejoicing as he journeys back to the village, is more than a demonstration of Luke’s attention to detail and a display of human pathos. *This is a core description of the Good Shepherd and is a major theme of Luke 15*, as K. Bailey rightly points out:

In this parable Jesus is defending his welcome of sinners. This welcome involves restoration to a community. The wandering sheep must be brought back to the fold now gathered in the village. This, for any shepherd, has a price. The search has its price but so does the act of restoration. In this theme of the burden of restoration there are clear Christological implications which point in the direction of the passion. The shepherd must carry on his shoulders the burden of the lost sheep, a detail that is specifically mentioned. Without the shouldering of this burden there is no restoration. This task the shepherd accepts with joy. (CC p. 588)

Note also the parallel with Is 40:10–11, where God is portrayed as a shepherd carrying his sheep. (CC p. 589)

**15:6** *called together...friends/neighbors* – τοὺς φίλους καὶ τοὺς γείτονας—This is repeated in 15:9 and recalls 14:12. (CC p. 585)

*rejoice with me* – συγχαρήτε μοι—This imperative is repeated at 15:9, the only two imperatives in this pericope. It announces the main theme of this entire chapter, the theme of joy, that climaxes at 15:23–24, 32. (CC p. 585)

Climax of the story (cf Rv 19:7). (TLSB)

Restoration brings joy to the shepherd in finding the sheep, and joy to the village when the shepherd returns with the sheep. This is why joy is repeated twice around the center of restoration to the house where the community lives. Joy is generally shared by a community in first-century Palestine. And in that culture joy would be shared at a meal in fellowship around a table. The table fellowship context of this entire section strongly suggests that the hearers would envision the shepherd/woman inviting friends and neighbors into his/her home to rejoice *over a meal*. (CC pp. 589-590)

As D. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, 159, points out:

In both instances Jesus does not allow the point to escape his Pharisees-scribes audience: *He is like the shepherd and the woman by seeking out the lost and separated folk from society and bringing them to the table fellowship of repentant sinners* (15:7, 10). With the authority to voice how God (“heaven”/“angels,” vv. 7, 10) views “sinners,” Jesus etches an impression of his own sending to invite and receive sinners who repent. We thus have the same mission portrayed as that of the messengers and the Seventy (-two) in 9:52–56 and 10:1–24, with the difference that Jesus as host summons his guests not to his own but to his Father’s “house” of the Kingdom of God (emphasis added). (CC p. 590)

*I have found my sheep* – εἶρον ... τὸ ἀπολωλός—Connected to the theme of rejoicing is the complementary theme of losing and finding (cf. 15:9, 24, 32). (CC p. 585)

**15:7** *I tell you* – Ὁν λέγω ὑμῖν, see comments at 4:24. This expression occurs twice in this passage (15:10). It is also used at 13:35 and 14:24, tying these three chapters together. (CC P. 585)

*rejoicing in heaven*. God’s concern and joy at the sinner’s repentance are set in stark contrast to the attitude of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (v. 2). (CSB)

The rejoicing in heaven is over those whom the shepherd has found. (TLSB)

ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ—This is a circumlocution for God and/or those (angels) who are in God’s presence (15:10). (CC p. 585)

This shared joy of the community at the restoration of a lost sheep becomes the chief point of Jesus’ application of the parable, introduced by the important phrase “I say to you” (15:7). The community of joy that Jesus has in mind is the earthly and now heavenly community that exists through him and the coming of his kingdom. The joy is over a sinner who repents. That is what his ministry has been about: calling tax collectors and sinners to repentance. Jesus stated this as the goal of his ministry at the very beginning, while at table with Levi the tax collector, when he said, “I have not come to call righteous, but sinners to repentance” (5:32). And he will reiterate it at the end of his ministry, entering the home of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, when “the lost”

become the declared goal of his ministry: “For the Son of Man came in order to seek and to save the lost” (τὸ ἀπολωλός; 19:10). Repentance here is not like that of the Pharisees or of the rabbis at the time of Jesus but is the repentance that John the Baptist preached and Jesus continued to call for in his ministry:

For first-century Judaism repentance was a way of bringing in the kingdom. In the preaching of Jesus repentance was a response to the kingdom already come. ... The sheep does nothing to prompt the shepherd to begin his search except to become lost. In the parable the shepherd finds the sheep. Then, in the conclusion to the parable, there is reported joy over “one sinner who *repents*.” Here “being found” is equated with “repentance.” Thus the parable of the Lost Sheep sets out a radically new understanding of the nature of repentance. (CC p. 590)

*righteous ... who not need no repentance.* Probably irony: those who think they are righteous (such as the Pharisees and the teachers of the law) and feel no need to repent. (CSB)

μετανοοῶντι ... μετανοίας—On repentance in Luke-Acts, see comments at 3:1–20 and 5:32. (CC p. 585)

But what of the ninety-nine? How would the Pharisees interpret this? Would they now be brought to see themselves not as the shepherd, but as the ninety-nine, that is, the “self-righteous” who claim that they “have no need of repentance” (assuming that those words of Jesus in 15:7 are to be taken ironically)? Are they still in the wilderness, or have they too returned to the village to join in the festive meal of rejoicing over the recovery of the lost sheep? The Pharisees know that these parables are directed against them. They know that, in Jesus’ view, all need to repent, so that there is no such thing as people who have no need for repentance. The Pharisees know that they have rejected John’s call for repentance and so have also rejected God’s plan of salvation in John and Jesus (cf. 7:29–35). As they listen carefully to the parable, they are never told whether the ninety-nine are still in the wilderness or have returned to the village. Jesus leaves it up in the air because these parables are his call to them to repentance. Are they going to be rescued by Jesus and rejoice with tax collectors? If so, they should stop grumbling, repent, be brought to the village, and join the feast with Jesus. If not, they will be left in the wilderness, in need of a shepherd to find them and bring them to the feast. The remaining ministry of Jesus, and the mission of the church, is to continue to call—and carry—the ninety-nine in from the wilderness home to the eschatological feast of Jesus. (CC pp. 590-591)

Luther says our entire life must be a continuous repentance. This was probably another lesson for the religious leaders.

The self-righteous imagine that they need no repentance. Before we are found by the Gospel, the Law must show we are hopelessly lost. (TLSB)

**15:1–7** In the first of three similar parables, Jesus uses the devotion of a shepherd to illustrate God’s willingness to find the wayward sinner. God does not abandon us to our foolishness but seeks us out, calling us to repentance and to faith in the Gospel. • Bring us home, dear Lord, and let there be joy in heaven. Grant us daily repentance. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Parable of the Lost Coin*

**8 “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that**

**I had lost.’ 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

**15:8-10** In the second parable, the repentant sinner is like a coin. Unlike the wandering sheep, the coin is inanimate, emphasizing its complete helplessness. (TLSB)

The parable of the lost coin emphasizes the same themes as the parable of the lost sheep. It has a parallel structure but fewer details. Its inclusion reflects Jesus’ custom, preserved especially in Luke, of telling two complementary accounts, one featuring action by a man and one by a woman (cf. 13:18–21). The joyful bearing of the burden of restoration is not featured, but again there is the losing, the seeking, the finding, and the community rejoicing, which context and custom suggest includes a festive meal. By repeating these themes, Jesus reiterates for the Pharisees the very essence of his ministry and prepares them for the fullest treatment of these themes in the parable of the prodigal son. (CC p. 591)

**15:8** *or – ἢ*—The “or” connects the two parables as a pair, one with a man as the main character, the other with a woman. See also the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in 13:18–21. (CC p. 585)

*ten silver coins.* A *drachma* was a Greek coin approximately equivalent to the Roman denarius, worth about an average day’s wages (Mt 20:2). (CSB)

Perhaps a collection of coins or bits of silver, worn as a headdress, brought into the marriage as the woman’s dowry and meant to sustain the family in times of want. The value of such a coin, a day’s wages, was once equivalent to the price of a sheep. (TLSB)

*δραχμάς*—This is the only place in the NT where “drachma” occurs. A drachma is a Greek coin, equivalent to a Roman denarius, estimated to be worth about a day’s wage. Ten drachmas would be the life savings of a family, enough to see them through a period when no work could be found. Could this coin be part of her dowry? (Cf. J. Jeremias, *Parables*, 133.) (CC p. 585)

A Greek drachma was worth about .17 or about one day’s wages. This was usually her only financial security. If divorced, it was all she had. Women often carried their coins in a tightly knotted rag. (Stuenkel)

*light a lamp* – οὐχὶ ἄπει λύχνον—This allusion to the lamp recalls Jesus’ catechetical teaching in chapters 8 and 11. (See the parable in 8:16–18; 11:33–36.) A typical Mediterranean house had few windows to allow natural light, so a lamp would be necessary for a thorough search. (CC p. 585)

*seek diligently.* Near Eastern houses frequently had no windows and only earthen floors, making the search for a single coin difficult. (CSB)

*ζητεῖ*—This is another pointer by Jesus to his previous catechetical teaching; see 11:9–10 and 12:31. (CC p. 585)

There may be one unique contribution that this second parable makes to the themes of Luke 15. Is it possible that the woman with the lamp searching her house for the lost coin is a symbol of the church? The early church gathered together for worship and catechesis in house churches. Illumination comes from the lamp through the Word of God (Ps 119:105), which the church brings to those who are assembled for worship in order to catechize them. The coin they have lost



could represent the offering that must be paid for the atonement of sins (Ex 30:16). Christ is that offering, that coin. The only way that coin is found is through catechesis and Baptism, both of which take place in the house church. Thus, taking the two parables together, Jesus the shepherd restores the sheep back to the fold, where there is rejoicing that the lost sheep has been found. But after restoration to the church has taken place, the church must continue to catechize so that Christ continues to be found in the ongoing life of the church. (CC p. 591)

Losing something in the house was not as simple as it sounds. House of that time had mud floor, some had grass or reeds on the floor. They had high and small windows for security's sake. Frequently animals of some sort were also kept in the house. (Stuenkel)

A typical house was dark even in daytime, having few or no windows. Christ, the light of the world, seeks out the lost. (TLSB)

**15:10** *joy before the angels* – ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ—This is also a circumlocution for “in God’s presence.” (CC p. 585)

The community of joy that Jesus has in mind is the earthly and now heavenly community that exists through him and the coming of his kingdom. The joy is over a sinner who repents. (CC)

Notice it does not speak of rejoicing by the angels but in the presence of angels. Who is doing this rejoicing in Heaven? I believe it logically includes not only God but also the saints in Heaven, who would so deeply appreciate the wonder of human conversion – especially the conversation of those they knew and loved on Earth. If they rejoice over conversions happening on Earth, then obviously they must be aware of what is happening on Earth – and not just generally, but specifically, down to the details of individuals coming to faith in Christ. (Heaven – Alcorn p. 71)

**15:8–10** The unrepentant sinner is like a coin lost in the darkness. Once lost, we have no more ability to find the Lord than the coin has to find its owner. Yet, the good news of Christ gives “light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (1:79). • Thank You, merciful Lord, for seeking us when we had no power to seek You. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Parable of the Lost Sons*

**11** And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. **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.’”**

**15:11–32** The father represents God, the prodigal represents a sinner, and the older brother represents those who consider themselves to be “righteous persons who need no repentance” (v 7). (TLSB)

Perhaps the most beloved of Jesus’ parables and one of the most cherished passages of Sacred Scripture, the parable of the prodigal son is unique to Luke. Along with the Good Samaritan story and the Emmaus account, it works to place Luke’s gospel in a unique position among the four gospels because of the sublime character of these stories. (CC p. 594)

Lk 15:1–2 sets all three parables of Luke 15 in a meal context. They follow closely upon the meal parables of Luke 14 and are closely related to the division that is being produced by Jesus’ mission and practice of table fellowship. (CC pp. 594-595)

No one sees this better than D. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, 159:

In 15:11–32 the division in the households of this mission (12:49–53) is graphically painted, with the antagonists highlighted in the elder son. ... The parallel to 15:1–2 is obvious. Just as the Pharisees-scribes criticize Jesus for receiving unclean folk and eating with them, thereby forcing Jesus to defend his practice (vv. 3–10), so the older son criticizes the father for doing the same, forcing him to give an account of his eating and drinking (vv. 30, 32). And just as Jesus entreats the Pharisees to enter the banquet house of the Kingdom (14:1–24), so the father entreats the son to enter his house for the feast (v. 28b). But in both cases the entreaty appears to be of no avail (cf. 14:15; 15:28). The home-meal fellowship is split asunder.

But will it be to no avail? That is the open-ended question. (CC p. 595)

The combination of parabolic words with parabolic actions signals the significance of the parable of the prodigal son for the table fellowship matrix. (CC p. 595)

J. Jeremias, *Parables*, 227, says: Jesus did not confine himself to spoken parables, but also performed parabolic actions. His most significant parabolic action was his extension of hospitality to the outcasts (Luke 19:5f.) and their reception into his house (Luke 15:1–2) and even into the circle of his disciples (Mark 2:14 par.; Matt. 10:3). *These feasts for*

*publicans are prophetic signs, more significant than words, silent proclamations that the Messianic Age is here, the Age of forgiveness* (emphasis added). (CC p. 595)

This parable reiterates the themes of the first two, the lost sheep and the lost coin: loss, restoration, joy, and the invitation to join the rejoicing. But this parable is far more elaborate, rich in details ripe for extensive interpretation. (CC p. 595)

The parable begins with the introduction of the three major characters: the father and his two sons (15:11). Jesus, the model of the father's love, eats with sinners, represented by the prodigal son. So it is natural for both father and son to be included in any title. But the elder son is an equally important character, and so he too is included in the full title "The Prodigal Son, His Elder Brother, and Their Loving Father." The fourth participant in the storytelling, of course, is the hearing community, and so the perception of the community also needs to be noted in the interpretation. (CC p. 595)

Thus from the start, the hearers expect a parable about two sons, and Jesus obliges by telling first about the prodigal and then about the elder brother. It is proper and helpful, therefore, to divide the interpretation into two parts: the prodigal son and his father (15:11–24) and the elder brother and his father (15:25–32). The two divisions also correspond to the two addressees of the message, tax collectors/sinners and Pharisees/scribes. The structure followed here is from K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* and *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* to which the chief features of this interpretation are also indebted. The conclusion of this exposition will describe the significance of this parable in the context of Luke's testimony to Jesus' practice of table fellowship. (CC pp. 595-596)

**15:11-32** The father represents God, the prodigal represents a sinner, and the older brother represents those who consider themselves to be "righteous persons who need no repentance" (v 7). (TLSB)

### **The Prodigal Son and His Father (15:11–24)**

The following chiasmic arrangement of the text was done by Kenneth Bailey:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| A | There was a man who had two sons  |   |
| 1 | and the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that falls to me."                                   | A SON IS LOST                             |
|   | And he divided <i>his living</i> between them.  |   |
| 2 | Not many days later the younger son sold all he had, journeyed into a far country and wasted <i>his property</i> in extravagant living. | GOODS WASTED IN EXPENSIVE LIVING          |
| 3 | And when he had spent everything a great famine arose in that country and he began to be <i>in want</i> .                               | EVERYTHING LOST                           |
| 4 | So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country and he sent him to his field <i>to feed</i>                        | THE GREAT SIN (FEEDING PIGS FOR GENTILES) |

pigs.	
5 And he would gladly have eaten the pods which the pigs ate and no one gave him <i>anything</i> .	TOTAL REJECTION
6 But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s servants have bread to spare but I perish here with <i>hunger</i> .”	A CHANGE OF MIND
6’ “I will arise and go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called your son; <b>make me a servant.</b> ’ ”	AN INITIAL REPENTANCE
5’ And he arose and came to his father. And while he was at a great distance his father saw him and <b>had compassion</b> and ran and embraced him and kissed him.	TOTAL ACCEPTANCE
4’ And the son said to the father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am <b>no more worthy</b> to be called your son.”	THE GREAT REPENTANCE
3’ And the father said to the servants, “Bring the best <b>robe</b> and put it on him and put a <b>ring</b> on his hands and <b>shoes</b> on his feet.	EVERYTHING GAINED RESTORED TO SONSHIP
2’ And bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and <b>make merry</b> ,	GOODS USED IN JOYFUL CELEBRATION
1’ for this my son was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found.” And they <b>began to make merry</b> .	A SON IS FOUND

In the twelve-stanza chiasm, the second six stanzas reverse the circumstances of the first six. “The last line of each of the first six stanzas (note the italics) has to do with [the prodigal’s] physical desires, losses, and needs. The second six stanzas in their final lines (note boldface type) deal progressively with the restoration to sonship and its ensuing joy.” At the center is the prodigal’s restoration to his father and to the household over which the father presides. For the catechumen, this has ecclesiological overtones, for what is being described in this part of the parable is how outcasts and sinners within Israel are restored to the new Israel through the table fellowship of Jesus. (CC p. 597)

**15:12** *give me* – δός μοι—This is the first of seven imperatives, all of them in the first section of the parable (cf. 15:19, 22, 23). (CC p. 593)

I want to get out and away from you, an insulting demand. (Stuenkel)

He wanted to be his own master. He desired to be independent of all authority and interference. (Taylor)

This request is an expression of man's desire to be independent of God, to become a god himself (Gen3:5) and lay out his life at his own will and for his own pleasure. (Trench)

The law allowed this to happen before the father's death. (TLSB)

*share of property.* The father might divide the inheritance (double to the older son; see Dt 21:17) but retain the income from it until his death. But to give a younger son his portion of the inheritance upon request was highly unusual. (CSB)

The possibility exists that the father might tell the older and younger sons how he would divide the inheritance, usually two-thirds for the eldest and the remaining third for the other sons minus the dowries for the daughters. (CC p. 597)

*estate* – Your very existence. He was asking for the father's death. (LL)

It is tempting to skip over the first stanza (15:12) to get to the more interesting parts of the story, but this verse establishes the circumstance for the entire parable. What the prodigal does in asking for the father to give him his share of the inheritance is to ask for the father's death. This would be a most outrageous request in first-century Israel, and for that matter, in any culture, even our own. Inheritance was only handed over at the father's death or in some other extraordinary circumstance, but never at the request of the younger son. Since the division of property occurred at death, this request amounts to asking the father to "die" so that the younger son might freely take what would be bequeathed to him. (CC p. 597)

*divided* – ὁ δὲ διεῖλεν αὐτοῖς—Note that αὐτοῖς is a plural, which means that the father divided the inheritance between the two sons, with the elder brother receiving his portion of the inheritance at this time (cf. 15:31). (CC p. 593)

But the father would never grant the sons the ability to *dispose* of their inheritance, that is, to sell it. Yet this is exactly what the father does! He divides his property between *both sons*, between the prodigal *and* the elder son. This is an unbelievable response by the father, one that would be considered by his community as verging on insanity, but one that the hearer might perceive as an expression of the father's love and mercy, as gift beyond compare. "The actions the father takes in the third story [the prodigal son] are unique, marvelous, divine actions *which have not been done by any father in the past.*" This is the first of three extraordinary acts of love by the father that would have shocked the community and shown them that this was a most unusual circumstance. But the community would also note that the elder brother received his inheritance, and his acquiescence to his father's division of the property shows that he has failed in his role as reconciler between his younger brother and his father. Not only is the prodigal son lost to the father, but there is a suspicion that the elder son is also alienated from him, a suspicion that will be confirmed by the rest of the parable. (CC pp. 597-598)

**15:13** *gathered all he had*. The son's motive becomes apparent when he departs, taking with him all his possessions and leaving nothing behind to come back to. He wants to be free of parental restraint and to spend his share of the family wealth as he pleases. (CSB)

συναγαγών—This “gathering together everything” may imply that the prodigal converted his inheritance into cash (as used by Plutarch in *Cato Minor* 6.7, § 672c). (Cf. J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1087; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 607; R. Stein, *Luke*, 405; and J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 783.) (CC p. 593)

The process of disposing of the estate would have been difficult in a community that was completely opposed to the prodigal's request and shocked at the father's consent. The prodigal would have to cut a quick deal with someone unscrupulous enough to help this young man turn his property into cash. The prodigal needed his inheritance to be in liquid assets that he could take to a “distant country” (15:13) where no one would know him. The community would watch him try to dispose of his inheritance, and “as he goes from one prospective buyer to another, the intensity of the community hatred and disgust mounts. At every turn he is greeted with amazement, horror, and rejection.” (CC p. 598)

Turn everything into cash. (Buls)

The process of disposing of the estate would have been difficult in a community that was completely opposed to the prodigal's request and shocked at the father's consent. The son would have to cut a quick deal with someone unscrupulous enough to help this young man turn his property into cash. Pawn shop. (Just)

*took a journey* – Man has a free will. God would have no service that is forced. (Ylvisaker)

*far country* – Actually means overseas. Wherever the father wasn't. (Stuenkel)

Away from the constraints of home. (TLSB)

εἰς χώραν μακρὰν—In the parable of the minas (19:12), a man of noble birth journeys into a “far country” to receive his kingship. (CC p. 593)

*squandered his property* – διεσκόρπισεν—διασκορπίζω is used here and at 16:1 in the sense of “waste, squander” property (BAGD) (CC p. 593)

*reckless living*. More specific in v. 30, though the older brother may have exaggerated. (CSB)

The idea combines carelessness with moral laxity (cf v 30). (TLSB)

ζῶν ἀσώτως—The participle is circumstantial, indicating that the prodigal dispersed his property *by means of* his own profligate living. This is the source for the traditional title of this parable as “The Prodigal [‘Extravagant’] Son.” (CC p. 593)

Not only was the father's fortune being squandered, but also his good name was being dragged in the dust. (Keller p. 20)

The hearer would not be surprised that the prodigal wasted his money in extravagant living, for this conforms with his behavior in asking for his inheritance before his father had died. Both are

signs of recklessness. There is much debate as to whether ἀσώτως, “extravagantly” (15:13), includes any sexual behavior that might have led to the prodigal’s poverty, especially in light of his elder brother’s accusation that he ate up his estate with prostitutes (15:30). But the word seems to be neutral with respect to the morality or immorality of the activity that led to the loss of his cash, and though it might be easy to assume, as did his elder brother, that the extravagant living included all kinds of immorality, the text does not explicitly state this. In fact, it leaves the matter unclear, so as to take the emphasis off the “sins” of the prodigal. Instead, it accents the false witness of the elder brother who does not put the best construction on his brother’s behavior. (CC p. 598)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 170, notes that the various Oriental versions (Old Syriac, Arabic) “do not label the prodigal as ‘immoral’ but only as ‘wasteful.’ That the Greek text and the vast majority of the Oriental versions do not condemn the prodigal for immorality is significant, and provides a background for understanding properly the older son’s remarks in verse 30.” (CC p. 598)

**15:14** *famine* – When people were killed and eaten raw. Shoe leather, rotten flesh and garbage were all devoured. They even ate the bark of palm trees. (Stuenkel)

The life of a penniless foreigner was esp difficult when there was little food around. (TLSB)

People venturing out at night were killed and eaten raw. Families in the village seeing death upon them bricked up the doors of their houses and awaited death in an inner room to keep their bodies from being devoured by hyenas. Entire villages were wiped out in this manner. (Stuenkel)

*be in need* – He hit bottom. When the money runs out so do friends. (PC)

**15:15** *hired himself out* – ekollatha - Glued himself to, foisted himself upon, begging to be a slave. (QV)

He took employment, like his father’s hired servants. (TLSB)

Once all his property is wasted, the prodigal finds himself in a desperate state. This is compounded when the entire land is plunged into famine and there is little to go around, especially for a foreigner. His desperation is such that he does the unthinkable. First, he attaches himself to a citizen of that country who must be a Gentile since he owns pigs. This in and of itself is a scandal. Then he places himself in a position to feed the swine, not only rendering himself unclean and an outcast, but showing how far he has sunk in his own personal demise. But if that is not bad enough, he is so desperate for food that he begins to desire to eat the food of the pigs, which would be unappetizing and lack nourishment. (CC p. 598)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 171–73, claims that these pods are not *ceratonia siliqua* that are eaten by human beings on occasion, but rather, this is a wild carob that pigs would scrounge for in times of famine but would be completely unnutritious for humans. (CC pp. 598-599)

This man has hit the bottom, and there is no one to give him anything. (CC p. 598)

*fed...pigs*. The ultimate indignity for a Jew; not only was the work distasteful but pigs were “unclean” animals (Lev 11:7). (CSB)

His employer was likely a Gentile; feeding the unclean beasts was the son's lowest step. (TLSB)

βόσκειν χοίρους—On pigs as unclean, see Lev 11:7–8; Deut 14:8; cf. also 1 Macc 1:47. (CC p. 593)

He not only renders himself unclean and an outcast, but it also shows how far he has sunk in his own personal demise. (CC p. 598)

**15:16** *longing to be fed* – ἐπεθύμει χορτασθῆναι/οὐδεὶς ἐδίδου—These two durative imperfects show the hopeless situation the prodigal is in—he continually was longing to be satisfied *by pig food*, because no one was giving him anything. *He was hungry!* I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 608, suggests that the imperfect reflects “an unfulfilled desire.” It is difficult to capture this in the translation. On χορτασθῆναι, see comments at 9:17 in the feeding of the five thousand. This word is also used in the beatitudes (6:21). (CC p. 593)

*Pods*. Seeds of the carob tree. (CSB)

Carob pods were regarded as animal fodder and were eaten only by the desperately poor. (TLSB)

These were from the Carob tree, common in the East and in the south of Europe. These grew to considerable size and produced long slender pods, with a pulp of sweetish taste, sometimes eaten by poorer people in Syria and Palestine, and commonly used for fattening swine. (Stuenkel)

He is so desperate for food that he begins to desire to eat the food of the pigs, which would be unappetizing and also lack nourishment. (CC p. 598)

*no one gave him anything* – He likely had friends when he had money, but none when poor. (TLSB)

**15:17** *came to himself* – Knew that his father would not taunt him or say, “I told you so.” He had a pleasant memory of home and his father.

Expression may imply repentance. (TLSB)

This brings the hearer to the center of the chiasm, marked by a change of heart. The prodigal comes to himself (εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν; 15:17), that is, he comes to his senses by recognizing the condition he is in. It may be right to call this his “initial repentance,” but K. Bailey, against most commentators, does not perceive this to be a full, complete repentance, which will come later on (15:21) (CC p. 599)

Thus K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 173–79. Many commentators disagree, however, for example, J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 784: “It is wrong-headed to question his sincerity or to detect continuing pride in his bid to become an independent employee” (against K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 173–79). (CC p. 599)

The prodigal “repents” insofar as he recognizes his desperate state and determines to change his current condition even if it means humbling himself before his father, his elder brother, and the village community. He knows where to go for salvation, and that is back to the father, for even the father's servants are better off than he is now. (CC p. 599)



*hired servants* – Not slaves; hired by the day or retained as workers. (TLSB)

*enough bread* – περισσεύονται—This is also used alongside ἐχορτάσθησαν in the feeding of the five thousand, concerning the leftovers after everyone was satisfied (9:17). Cf. also 12:15. (CC p. 593)

This is also used in the feeding of the five thousand where there were leftovers.

**15:18-19** The son realizes his wickedness and his plight but would still bargain for his father’s help, an illustration of the depth of human depravity. (TLSB)

**15:18** *I have sinned* – Heaven means against God, no excuses. (Buls)

And so he journeys back to the father, intending to make this confession: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son; *make me as one of your hired workers*” (15:18–19). There is a great deal of repentance here. This prodigal is crushed. He realizes that the cause of his miserable condition is sin against the father and against heaven (a circumlocution for God as often in Matthew). His actions have cast him outside the family. He is no longer worthy to be called a son. He is a true outcast, just like the tax collectors and sinners who were coming to Jesus to be hearers of the Word. (CC p. 599)

**15:19** *trat me like one of your servants* – ποιήσόν με—The son began with the imperative “give to me the portion of the property that falls to me.” Now with the second imperative in this section, the son who has lost everything is reduced to saying “make me as one of your hired workers.” (CC p. 593)

The son’s repentance is similar to what many in Jesus’ day considered repentance, that is, repentance as a human work, with an offer, from the person’s side, of conditions, terms, reparations. Repentance was something that humans could initiate outside of God’s initiative.

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 179–80, puts it this way:

The idea that repentance is a “work” which man does prior to God’s acceptance of him is found all through rabbinic literature. ... Thus for the rabbis repentance was primarily a work of man which assured him of God’s favor.

Furthermore, the idea of reparations and of atonement became a part of the doctrine of repentance. ... The act of repentance was itself an atoning work. Reparations and atonement were made by the act of repentance. ...

In summary, it can be said that for the rabbis, repentance was a work that man did to earn God’s favor. At times man needed God’s help. God had to come part of the way as man came the rest of the way. The work of repentance had to be sincere and accompanied by reparations for the sin along with a determination to avoid all further sin. Repentance atoned for sin. (CC p. 599)

The prodigal shows that he plans to offer this kind of repentance by the final line of his confession: “*make me as one of your hired workers.*”

C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 150, supports K. Bailey here: “ ‘Treat me as one of your hired servants’ (vs. 19). A typical Jewish father might have considered this expedient until the son’s

reformation had been confirmed. It would, moreover, allow the youth to make reparations required by repentance (cf. Luke 19:8).” (CC p. 599)

But this is a “face-saving plan” in which “he will save himself. He wants no grace.” By asking to be a hired worker, the prodigal seeks a number of advantages. He is able to be back with the family even though he is not yet restored to the family; he is making money and may begin to pay back the debt he owes the father in squandering his share of the estate; he won’t have to live off his elder brother’s estate but will be making his own way; and he maintains a certain amount of freedom that will allow him a certain amount of dignity and status with respect to his father and brother. The downside of his plan is that he must live in a community that would consider him an outcast. He would be a pariah, but this is the chance he will take to extricate himself from his situation. The prodigal is repenting, but with certain conditions: (CC pp. 599-600)

Thus, in regard to the father the prodigal fully intends to confess his failure. That failure seems to be understood in terms of money lost. He has a plan that will give him independence from his father and provide an opportunity to compensate for his errors. With pride intact he intends to order his father to make him a hired servant. (CC p. 600)

For Pharisees and scribes who were accusing Jesus of table fellowship with the unclean, this reading of the prodigal’s “initial repentance” would have the ring of truth. They could not help but see that the prodigal was responding as a good Jew would respond, with a deep sense of sorrow over his sin and an equally deep desire to make amends for that sin. If the story were to end here, this would be a good moralistic parable. It would conform fully to Pharisaic expectations about the way in which outcasts like the tax collectors and sinners who were listening to this parable should be restored to Israel. They must first show *through their deeds* that they deserve to be readmitted into the community of Israel. (CC p. 600)

**15:20** *father saw him* – Father is watching and waiting. (Stuenkel)

*felt compassion* – ποιήσόν με—The son began with the imperative “give to me the portion of the property that falls to me.” Now with the second imperative in this section, the son who has lost everything is reduced to saying “make me as one of your hired workers.” (CC p. 593)

But the big surprise for these Pharisees and scribes is yet to come. The prodigal has been true to form, predictable in his behavior. *The unpredictable character throughout this parable is the father.* First he grants the prodigal’s desire for his inheritance and now accepts the prodigal fully back into his household with joy.

C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 150, notes: “Joy over a recovered sheep or coin is understandable. They are valuable and we benefit from their being found. But the ‘excessive joy’ of the father at the prodigal’s return makes no sense. At the very least, one stands puzzled at the father’s joy.” (CC p. 600)

Jesus’ description of the father’s actions is a portrait of complete and total grace, of unconditional love. The climax of this section of the parable is Jesus’ description of the father’s compassion. (CC p. 600)

The hearer will recall that in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the compassion of the Samaritan is at the center of the structure as the climax (10:25–37). (CC p. 600)

“The verb [σπλαγχνίζομαι, “have compassion”] (7:13; 10:33) expresses the heart of the story: the father’s compassion precedes any confession of repentance by the son and corresponds to the seeking and searching in the two preceding parables.” (CC pp. 600-601)

To have bowels yearning. Also used in Good Samaritan story.

In the NT, this word is largely used only of God, of Jesus, and in parables of characters representing God. E.g., it describes the Good Samaritan, which likely represents Jesus. The word, therefore, represents gracious love beyond the human norm, understanding and reaching into the life of another. (TLSB)

*ran* – The grace of the father clearly precedes the repentance of the prodigal. The father runs to meet his wayward son:

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 181, notes: “An Oriental nobleman with flowing robes never runs anywhere. To do so is humiliating.” Bailey goes on to quote L. P. Weatherhead, who attributes this saying to Aristotle: “Great men never run in public” (p. 181, quoting L. P. Weatherhead, *In Quest of a Kingdom* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1943] 90; Weatherhead does not document his quotation from Aristotle). (CC p. 601)

Shows acceptance of the wayward son before any question is asked. Remarkably, the father ran to his son, which was below the dignity of the older man. (TLSB)

*embraced him and kissed him* – ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν —In Genesis, Joseph throws his arms around the neck of his brother Benjamin (45:14) and his father Jacob (46:29) and kisses his other brothers (45:15). These actions were also accompanied by weeping. The same phrases describe the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau (LXX Gen 33:4). (CC pp. 593-594)

Falling on the neck and kissing are gestures that acknowledge *family relationship* (Gen 33:4; cf. G. Stählin, φιλέω κτλ., *TDNT* 9:139). Other commentators suggest that the kiss is a sign of forgiveness: J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1089; K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 182; C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 150; and I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 610. (CC p. 601)

The father expresses his complete reconciliation and acceptance of his son publicly—and *he does this before the prodigal has uttered a word of confession*. (CC p. 601)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 181, notes: “We can confidently assume that the father lives in a village as part of the community. ... What the father does in this homecoming scene can best be understood as a series of dramatic actions calculated to protect the boy from the hostility of the village and to restore him to fellowship within the community.” (CC p. 601)

Bill Board – I Love You, I Love You, I Love You.

**15:21** *I have sinned* – He expresses the speech he had rehearsed.

The son begins his speech but is cut off before he can offer his bargain (v 19). (TLSB)

The prodigal is clearly shocked at how the father receives him. He expected to be rejected, or at best, lectured at length about his behavior. But instead, he is received as a son. He makes

confession as his father is embracing and kissing him. It is the same confession that he rehearsed, but with one significant omission. He does not ask the father to make him as one of the father's hired workers. By omitting this simple condition, the prodigal shows that his repentance in the presence of the father's total acceptance is true repentance. The omission of this phrase is *not* because he is interrupted by the father in the middle of his confession! (CC p. 601)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 183, says: "Commentators too numerous to note assume that the father interrupted him." Thus I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 610; R. Stein, *Luke*, 406; J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1089–90. (CC p. 601)

He leaves off this part of what he had planned to say because he is overwhelmed by grace!

He [the prodigal] sees that the point is not the lost money, but rather the broken relationship which he cannot heal. Now he understands that any new relationship must be *a pure gift from his father*. He can offer no solution. To assume that he can compensate his father with his labor is an insult. "I am unworthy" is now the only appropriate response. (CC p. 601)

**15:22-23** *best robe ... ring ... shoes... celebratet*. Each was a sign of position and acceptance (cf. Ge 41:42; Zec 3:4): a long robe of distinction, a signet ring of authority, sandals like a son (slaves went barefoot), and the fattened calf for a special occasion.

ἐξενέγκατε ... ἐνδύσατε ... δότε ... φέρετε ... θύσατε—With five imperatives in these two verses, the father prepares the feast for celebrating the son's return. (CC p. 594)

The father desires that his acceptance of his son be clearly communicated to the community and to his servants, and so he demonstrates his acceptance by visible means, dressing the prodigal as a son who has been restored—the kiss, the new robe of the messianic age (Is 61:10) and Jesus' wedding feast parable (Mt 22:11–12), the ring of authority, and the shoes of a free man. The village would clearly see that the son has been restored to the father's house, and so they too must receive him back in the same way. The father offers them the opportunity to express their acceptance by sacrificing the fatted calf and having a feast *for the community*, for "the main point of killing such a large animal is to be able to invite the entire community" and "the purpose of such a banquet includes a desire to reconcile the boy to the *whole* community." (CC p. 602)

Jesus uses the verb "sacrifice" (θύω) for the killing of the fatted calf. This word calls to mind the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in Lk 22:7. In the ears of the first-century catechumen, this word belongs to the language of passion, sacrifice, and Eucharist, where Christ is the sacrifice on the altar for the people of God to consume. While θύω is not used in the eucharistic narrative of 22:14–20, its use in 22:7 introduces the whole narrative of Christ's paschal passion, including the Eucharist, which is the sacrament Jesus' disciples are to do in remembrance of his passion (22:19). St. Paul also uses the verb to sum up these paschal and eucharistic themes: "Christ our Passover was sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). (CC p. 602)

**15:22** *servants* – Different word from that in v 17. (TLSB)

Here the word "doulos" is used. It means slave. A slave had no life outside of what the master desired. He could not go home at night and have a freedom to do what he wanted.

*Quickly* – ταχύ—This goes with all the ensuing imperatives in 15:22–23. (CC p. 594)

*best robe* – Was reserved for the most distinguished guest. (IB)

Heavenly Father is waiting with the robe of righteousness that has your name on it. (LL)

Festive and showing favor. Cf Gn 37:3–4. (TLSB)

*put a ring on his hand* – Meant the son was still an heir.

Symbol of status and authority. (TLSB)

*shoes on his feet* – Shoes showed he was not a slave because they did not wear them.

Dressed from head to toe as a son. (TLSB)

**15:23** *fattened calf* – τὸν μύσχον τὸν σιτευτόν—Literally “the grain-fed” (σῖτος): “In contrast to the cattle left to graze on grass, the beast destined for special feasts is stuffed with grain to put on extra weight and tenderness” (L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 238). (CC p. 594)

Reserved for if the king of the land should come. (Stuenkel)

*kill it* – Calls to mind the sacrifice of Jesus.

θύσατε—The verb is used only four times in Luke, three times in this parable (15:23, 27, 30) and once in the narrative of the Last Supper (22:7). Its derivatives occur twice in the infancy narrative and twice during the travel narrative: θυσία (2:24; 13:1) and θυσιαστήριον (1:11; 11:51). (CC p. 594)

*let’s eat and celebrate* – φαγόντες εὐφρανθῶμεν—The participle indicates simultaneous action with the hortatory subjunctive, “let us eat and make merry.” I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 611, notes that “εὐφραίνω is especially used of the enjoyment of meals (12:19; 16:19).” (CC p. 594)

The way to “make merry” (Lk 15:23) and express joy in this community is in table fellowship. Restoration to the community comes through feasting with the community at the table of the father. What is the stated reason for the father’s joy? Framed by two occurrences of εὐφραίνομαι, “make merry,” it is “because this my son was dead and has come to life, he was lost and has been found” (15:24). (CC p. 602)

**15:24** *dead and is alive* – From the father’s perspective, his son’s plight was worse than imagined. (TLSB)

*lost and is found* – The parallel themes of dead then alive again and lost then found are found in several narratives that may be part of the OT background to our text. In particular, Joseph’s father considered him lost and dead but then was overjoyed when he found Joseph alive (Genesis 37–50), and God’s purpose in all this was “to save many lives” (Gen 50:20). Jonah too was lost at sea then miraculously was brought back to land. God’s purpose with him too was that many people—the city of Nineveh—might not perish, but believe and live. As with Noah and the flood, these OT accounts may point to the NT theme of death and resurrection through Baptism. (CC)

How would the first-century catechumen, listening to the gospel according to St. Luke in the corporate liturgy, have understood this parable about the lost being found and the dead being

brought back to life? This language of the father is baptismal: dying and coming back to life (rising), formerly lost and now found. It is possible that the Pauline baptismal language reflects the teaching of Jesus in this parable of the prodigal son. (CC)

J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 786, broaches this point but rejects it: “The language of death and coming to life could be baptismal in a Pauline context, but hardly in Luke, and is somewhat prepared for in v 16. The language here is indeed striking, and while it does not actually break the bounds of the story, it comes closer to being immediately symbolic than at other points of the parable.” (CC)

L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 238, says: “The implications of being lost and found as dying and rising were pointed out in the interpretation of the finding of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:46). The theme echoes the two previous parables (15:6, 9). A ‘son’ who dies and is found again cannot but have had deeper resonances for early Christian readers.” Johnson also says: “So eager, Jesus suggests, is God to receive back those who have wandered from covenant with him. This aspect of the return is made explicit by the use of ‘dying and rising’ language” (p. 241). (CC pp. 602-603)

Jesus suggests both a physical and spiritual dimension to his meaning, as he did in Nazareth when he announced the program of his ministry based on Isaiah 61 (Lk 4:18–19). The father thought that the prodigal was *physically* dead, but here he is *physically* alive; he knew that he was *spiritually* dead by the way he treated the father, but here he is repentant and is restored so that he is *spiritually* alive. He is home “in good health,” both physically and spiritually (15:27). (CC pp. 602-603)

The prodigal’s religious instruction (“catechesis”) had occurred during the many years he lived in the father’s house before deciding to strike off on his own. He knew that his father was gracious and merciful almost to a fault, granting him his crazy request to have his inheritance now. He remembered the mercy of his father when he was completely lost wallowing with the swine in foreign fields. He returned reluctantly because, even though he remembered a loving father, his sin was so great and he thought he had to have a plan to work his way back into the father’s graces. His conversion comes when he is confronted with the radical nature of the father’s grace, the Gospel. Now the prodigal is like the newly baptized who has received the kiss of peace (reconciliation), the robe of righteousness,

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 185, says: “Does the robe carry any eschatological significance? Quite likely. Jeremias argues at some length that it does [Jeremias, *Parables*, 189]. Isaiah 61 is given special attention in the teaching of Jesus. Verse 10 of that chapter reads, ‘For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.’ ” (CC p. 603)

and now is ready to join in the eucharistic feast of the Father. How many tax collectors and sinners, Jews who had fallen away from Israel and become outcasts, would have seen themselves in this prodigal? How many catechumens, Jews who knew the promises of the OT about the coming of a merciful Messiah, would have seen themselves in the prodigal and would have seen in the kiss, the robe, the dying and rising, and the feast the church’s initiatory process for the catechumen? (CC p. 603)

The fourth-century practice of bringing the catechumen from the font in his baptismal robe, the confirmation anointing that announces to the community that the dead have

risen in Christ, and the kiss of peace as the first act of the newly baptized are all drawn from this parable as well as other passages. (CC p. 603)

15:25 OLDER BROTHER – The following chiasmic arrangement of the text was done by Kenneth Bailey:

<p>B Now the elder son was in the fields          1 and as he came and drew near to              the house              he heard music and dancing              and he called one of the boys and              asked what this meant.          2 And he said to him, ‘Your brother              has come              and your father has killed the              fatted calf              because he received him with              peace.’          3 But he was angry and refused to go              in              so his father came out              and was entreating him.          4 But he answered his father,              ‘Lo these many years <i>I have</i>              <i>served you</i>              <i>and I have never disobeyed your</i>              <i>commandments</i>              <i>yet you never gave me a kid to</i>              <i>make merry with my friends.</i>          4’ ‘But when <i>this son of yours</i> came              who has <i>devoured your living with</i>              <i>harlots</i>              <i>you killed for him the fatted calf.</i>’          3’ And he said to him, “Beloved son,              you are always with me              and all that is mine is yours.          2’ “It was fitting to make merry and              be glad              for this your brother was dead and              is alive,              he was lost and is found.”</p>	<p>HE COMES           YOUR BROTHER—SAFE              A FEAST           A FATHER COMES TO RECONCILE           COMPLAINT I          (HOW YOU TREAT ME)           COMPLAINT II          (HOW YOU TREAT HIM)           A FATHER TRIES TO RECONCILE           YOUR BROTHER—SAFE              A FEAST</p>
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The second part of the parable is about the elder brother. As the chiasmic structuring indicates, it is parallel to the first part of the parable that deals with the prodigal. Here the two main characters are the father and the elder brother; the prodigal does not appear except by way of reference. There are only seven stanzas. An eighth and final one would balance the structure and give the ending or denouement, but there is none since the hearer does not know how the elder son will react. (CC p. 604)

*was in the field* – Doing his work. (Stuenkel)

His work likely kept the older son from the feast. (TLSB)

The second part begins with the brother in the fields. This narrative detail may suggest his distance from the father. It does seem to conform to the picture of an estate so large that all that transpired in the first part of the parable could have happened without the knowledge of one who was in a distant field. (CC p. 604)

*music and dancing* – Unmistakable sounds of celebration. (TLSB)

Hired professional musicians. This was a choral dance with gestures, clapping of hands, perhaps also steps, and was a grand spectacle for the audience. (CC)

The elder brother's story begins with the sound of the feast, its music and dancing. The ongoing feast is the point of departure for this part of the parable and the point of reference throughout the rest of the parable. The hearer could not help but remember how, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus told the Pharisees at the meal with Levi the tax collector that it is necessary to feast when the bridegroom is present. The same urgency attends this parable. The elder brother would no doubt know what was happening immediately on hearing "the beat of the music" for "village rhythms are specific and known." Such music would only accompany a grand event. Indeed, music itself was quite rare, and the elder son had left for the fields knowing that no such feast was planned. (CC pp. 604-605)

**15:26** *asked* – ἐπινοθάνετο—The imperfect, "he kept asking," suggests that the elder brother asked a number of questions of the young boy. (Cf. W. Arndt, *Luke*, 352; K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 194.) (CC p. 594)

This feast, then, is unexpected, and he asks about what is happening. Already with this action, he is departing from normal and expected behavior for an elder brother. The sound of the music should have caused him to rush in and join the festivities, for he would be required by custom to serve as the host-steward of the meal. The elder son would be responsible for the arrangements so that the father could be the gracious host. But his cautious reaction, his questioning, and his anger when he finds out the reason for the feast prepare the hearer for the insult that is coming. (CC p. 605)

**15:27** *safe and sound* – ὑγιαίνοντα—"In good health" (RSV "safe and sound"), in which his "health" is more than physical and would include spiritual wellness. (CC p. 594)

Jesus repeats the reason for the feast in the words spoken to the elder brother: "Your brother has come, and your father has sacrificed the calf, the fatted one, because he received him back in good health" (15:27). What angers the elder brother about the prodigal son's return is *the feast*. It becomes the center of his first complaint to the father: "To me you never once gave a goat in order that I might make merry with my friends" (15:29). The elder brother sees the contrast: the father sacrificed the fatted calf for his prodigal brother, while the father had never even sacrificed a goat for him and his friends. (Note that he mentions his friends and not his family.) It is clear from his reaction that his anger is enormous and that there is no way that he will enter into this feast *because the feast itself is the problem*. (CC p. 605)

**15:28** *he (older brother)*. The forgiving love of the father symbolizes the divine mercy of God, and the older brother's resentment is like the attitude of the Pharisees and teachers of the law who opposed Jesus. (CSB)



*was angry* – Into his elder son’s fury the father enters with a third expression of unbelievable love and grace. The father comes to the elder son and pleads with him to *enter the feast*, and the son turns him down by arguing with him in public *at the feast*. This is a great insult to the father, which shows that “there is now a break in relationship between the older son and his father that is nearly as radical as the break between the father and the younger son at the beginning of the parable.” The elder son insults his father by not addressing him with a title (contrast the prodigal in 15:18, 21). His complaints show how he has seen himself in the father’s house: as a slave, not as a son; as obedient to the father’s rules, but reluctantly. And then he accuses his brother of sins that he could not know about, that he “ate up your estate with prostitutes” (15:30)

L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 238–39, again offers an intriguing suggestion: “Is there once again something of an echo of the charge made against Jesus, that he also consorted with such folk (7:34, 39)?” (CC p. 605)

He compares the father’s treatment of the prodigal son to the father’s treatment of him, the elder son, and it comes up wanting as far as the elder son is concerned. (CC p. 605)

*refused to go in* – The sound of the music should have caused him to run in and join the festivities; as the older brother, he would be required by custom to serve as the host-steward of the meal. The older son was responsible for arrangements so that the father could serve as the gracious host. But the older son does not join the festivities, let alone take charge of them. (LL)

K. Bailey sees seven insults in the elder brother’s words.

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 196–200: (1) “The older son addresses his father with no title.” (2) “The older son demonstrates the attitude and spirit of a slave, not a son.” (3) “He has insulted his father publicly and yet is able to say, ‘I have never disobeyed your commandment.’” Bailey concludes that this is the “spirit of Pharisees.” (4) “The older son accuses his father of favoritism with the word, ‘To me you never gave a kid.’” (5) “The older son declares that he is not a part of the family.” (6) “The older son announces his concept of ‘joy.’ For the older son, a good meal with his cronies is an appropriate occasion for joy. The recovery of a brother as from the dead is not. He is not willing to rejoice at this banquet.” (7) “The older brother attacks his younger brother [accusing him of living with harlots].” (CC pp. 605-606)

*entreated him* – παρεκάλει—The imperfect suggests that the father was continually pleading with him. L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 238, suggests the translation “was comforting” to show that this was a continuation of the father’s compassion (15:20). (CC p. 594)

But the father is not deterred. Even in the face of these mounting insults, he addresses his elder son affectionately as “child” (τέκνον; 15:31) and assures him that his place in the house as well as his inheritance are secure. This is another example of the outrageous love of the father in which there is “no judgment, no criticism, no rejection, but only an outpouring of love.” (CC p. 606)

Again, the father disregards the dignity of his position and condescends to encourage a son. (TLSB)

The father meets his older son's fury with the third expression of unbelievable love and grace in this parable. The father pleads with the son to enter the feast. The son turns him down by arguing with him in a public feast. (LL)

**15:29** *I served you* – Elder son had become a slave at his own desire.

δουλεύω σοι—This present tense with a dative of advantage, “I am a slave for you,” captures the elder son's feeling that he has been bound in slavery to the father. (CC p. 594)

In his mind he had been thoroughly moral, perfectly respectable, and exceedingly industrious, but he had been all these, not from the loving impulse of a son, but, as it now appears from a desire of reward. (Taylor)

Matthew 6:2(giving to needy), 5 (public prayer) – “They have received their reward in full.”

Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

*never disobeyed your command* – Hyperbole. Yet, this son behaved as he thought his younger brother should have behaved—as a servant. (TLSB)

*even a young goat*. Cheaper food than a fattened calf. (CSB)

Minimal basis for a feast. (TLSB)

**15:30** *this son of yours*. The older brother would not even recognize him as his brother, so bitter was his hatred. (CSB)

*devoured* – Wasted; the son lost a third of the family fortune. (TLSB)

*with prostitutes* – Accusation made without evidence. (Stuenkel)

**15:31** *son* – teknon - The most loving term for a child.

*You are always with me* – The older son did not realize that being with his father was its own reward. (TLSB)

*all that is mine is yours*. The father's love included both brothers. The parable might better be called the parable of “The Father's Love” rather than “The Prodigal Son.” It shows a contrast between the self-centered exclusiveness of the Pharisees, who failed to understand God's love, and the concern and joy of God at the repentance of sinners. (CSB)

Not only a future benefit of the remaining inheritance, but also a present reality. The riches of the father were already the son's to enjoy. (TLSB)

**15:32** fitting to celebrate – The father does not need to justify himself, but he wishes his son would see the joy in recovering his brother. (TLSB)

*dead and is alive*. A beautiful picture of the return of the younger son, which also pictures Christian conversion (see Ro 6:13; Eph 2:1, 5). The words “lost and is found” are often used to mean “perished and saved” (19:10; Mt 10:6; 18:10–14). (CSB)

Lost to the family. (TL5B)

ἔζησεν—This is an ingressive aorist, “he has come to life.” (CC p. 594)

The reason the father gives to the son for the feast and its accompanying joy is the same reason he announced to the community at the conclusion to the first part of the parable: “Because this your brother was dead and he has come to life, and he was lost and has been found” (15:32). The repetition of words that echo baptismal teaching assures the tax collectors and sinners who desire to be hearers of the Word that the messianic feast is a divine necessity for those who have been lost but found, who were dead and now are made alive, *because joy at the community’s feast is the goal of the story*. In 15:32 εὐφραίνομαι, “make merry,” is linked to δεῖ, “it is necessary,” to indicate the divine necessity of feasting in the kingdom of God when a sinner repents. This occurrence of δεῖ in 15:32 “echoes the Lucan use of it as an expression of an aspect of salvation-history.” It is part of Luke’s passion vocabulary. (Lk 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 24:7, 26, 44) The same divine necessity that dictated the death and resurrection of Jesus (24:26) stands behind the urgent necessity for celebration and joy at table. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the basis for the eucharistic celebration by those who were lost and dead, but who now, through baptismal incorporation into Jesus, are found and alive. (CC - 606)

Part of the beauty of this parable is that the hearer is left hanging. There is no resolution with regard to the elder son. Will he repent and join the feast, or will he continue to reject the father’s grace and love and therefore reject his invitation to the feast? The Pharisees and scribes knew that Jesus was telling this parable against them (just as they did in 20:19 after the parable of the workers in the vineyard). It poses to them some hard-hitting questions:

Will you share in the communal joy over the prodigal’s return? If not, why not? ... If you were able to feel the joy of the shepherd and the woman, why are you unable to feel the joy of the father? *Do you get more excited about money and animals than about people* (12:15–16; 14:5)? Who are you, in your relation to God and humans, in light of your absence of joy? Why are you not able to participate in the divine necessity to rejoice? (CC pp. 606-607)

Luke 15 opened with complaints by the Pharisees and scribes against Jesus’ table fellowship with sinners, which is an expression of Jesus’ eschatological kingdom. The feast for the prodigal is an expression of “the year of the Lord’s favor” (4:19) for outcasts like the prodigal, tax collectors, and sinners. Are they willing to join the community that rejoiced at the feast over the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son? For *this is the ongoing feast* at which the teller of the parable is host, in which his gracious love and mercy will be offered in body broken and blood poured out. He himself will be sacrificed by the heavenly Father for the sins of all prodigals and all elder brothers. (CC p. 607)

The parable of the prodigal son, the elder brother, and their father carries great significance in the context of Luke’s table fellowship matrix. First it is an apologetic parable told against the murmuring of the Pharisees and scribes. It justifies Jesus’ practice of table fellowship, i.e., “*that in his actions the love of God to the repentant sinner is made effectual*.” Luke’s introductory remarks in 15:1–2 clearly draw the lines between the tax collectors/sinners and Pharisees/scribes, suggesting that in the third parable of Luke 15, the prodigal son represents all repentant tax collectors and sinners and the older brother represents all unrepentant Jewish religious authorities, particularly the Pharisees and scribes. The charges formulated against Jesus sum up the opinion of Jesus’ opponents about his table fellowship thus far in the gospel: “And both the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’ ” (15:2). (CC p. 607)

By singling out the Pharisees and scribes, Luke is preparing for the charges against Jesus in his trial and the summation of those charges by the Emmaus disciples in 24:20. By listing the Pharisees first in 15:2, Luke signals their leadership in bringing charges against Jesus because of his table fellowship. Thus in Luke 15, the Pharisaic party, the opponents of Jesus *outside Jerusalem*, first states charges against Jesus based on his table fellowship, having gathered evidence by witnessing Jesus' table fellowship firsthand from the beginning in Luke 5. (CC p. 607)

Second, the parable of the prodigal son reflects the significance of repentance for acceptance into the kingdom in Lukan table fellowship. Luke has accented repentance in the table fellowship of Jesus in 5:29–32; 7:18–35; and 7:36–50. Table fellowship with God is restored through repentance. This fellowship overflows with joy, expressing itself in gifts of love in the parable of the prodigal son. The repentance of the prodigal son fuels the story and forces its climax. The prodigal son's first repentance is signaled by his awareness of his situation at his own hands: "having come to himself" or "having come to his senses" (εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν; 15:17). Twice Luke repeats the words of repentance: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (15:18–19, 21). But it is only in the second use that we have true repentance. This profound act of repentance results from the incredible response of the father when he sees his son return home. The repentance of the prodigal son becomes the prototype for all those who desire table fellowship with God in the eschatological kingdom. Thus

the parable portrays the message of Jesus, the kingdom-preacher, especially with the Lukan stress on the divine willingness to accept the repentant sinner into that kingdom. ... In the Lukan gospel as a whole the story exemplifies the proclamation of the Lord's year of favor, which Jesus was sent to announce to the downtrodden (4:18–19). (CC p. 608)

Thus Luke 15 ends with its proclamation of the mercy of a loving father made manifest to the repentant sinner, no matter how gross the sinful conduct has been. It identifies Jesus himself as the incomparable herald of that proclamation. He comes, moreover, to associate and dine with tax collectors and sinners because through him such persons can find acceptance with God himself. (CC p. 608)

Finally, the parable of the prodigal son explicitly connects the Lukan theme of joy in the new era of salvation with the Lukan table fellowship matrix. "JOY results from the experience of salvation (soteriology), come through Jesus Christ (Christology), incorporating one into the lasting community of friendship with the Father (eschatology) through the power of the Spirit."

This is the subtitle of P. J. Bernadicou, "Programmatic Texts of Joy in Luke's Gospel" on the Lukan theme of joy. See also Bernadicou's "Biblical Joy and the Lukan Eucharist," subtitled "Joy in the presence of God is basic to biblical religion. It finds its fullest expression in the Eucharistic celebration"; "The Lukan Theology of Joy (Revisited)"; and J. Navone, "Lukan Joy." (CC p. 608)

Chapters 14 and 15 form the core of Luke's theology of joy, but the banquet discourses of Luke 14 prepare for the expression of that joy at the feast in 15:11–32. The beatitude of Luke 14:15 "indicates that the hearer understood Jesus' allusion to the joy of the eschatological feast," but it is still an allusion. (CC pp. 608-609)

The parable of the prodigal son, however, explicitly connects joy with the eschatological kingdom and Lukan table fellowship. The first two parables of Luke 15, with the theme of the joy

of God at the repentance of a sinner, anticipate the fullest expression of that theme in the feast of celebration when the prodigal son returns home. The vocabulary of this section is filled with the Lukan motif of joy: χαίρω, “rejoice”/χαρά, “joy,” in 15:5, 7, 10, 32; συγχαίρω, “rejoice,” in 15:6, 9; εὐφραίνομαι, “make merry,” in 15:23, 32; and συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν, “music and dancing,” in 15:25. The joy at the feast in Luke 15 is a parabolic anticipation of the joy of the disciples in Luke 24 as they return to the temple, praising God (24:52–53). The Lukan vocabulary for this joy permeates Luke 24 (χαρά, “joy,” in 24:41, 52; εὐλογέω, “bless,” in 24:30, 50, 51, 53). *True joyful celebration at the table of Jesus comes to the Emmaus disciples after he teaches them, breaks bread with them, and is revealed to them as the risen Lord.* What E. C. Davis says about the parables of Luke 15 holds true for Luke 24 as well: “Once again Luke presents the New Age as an invitation to fellowship (συγκαλεῖ [15:6, 9]) which is rejected by the leaders, but accepted by the outcasts.” (CC p. 609)

E. C. Davis, “The Significance of the Shared Meal in Luke-Acts,” 70. Davis also comments:

In these three parables this theme of the New Age—salvation and joy—are present possessions of the repentant. That Luke intends references to the Banquet and its Age is seen not only in the total context, the shared meal as an introduction, the feast of the stories, and the permeating theme of joy, but also in the elaborate details of the return of the prodigal son. The bestowal of the new robe is a symbol of the New Age, as is the forgiveness stressed in the closing verses of the chapter (pp. 69–70). (CC p. 609)

**15:11–32** God found us when we were far from Him. We are in no position to begrudge His grace similarly given to others, no matter how unworthy they appear to us. How meagerly we celebrate Baptism and public declarations of faith! God calls us to a joyful celebration, not only of our own salvation, but also for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. • Father, as You welcome me, grant me joy in welcoming others. Amen. (TLSB)