

As we go through ch 13-16 of Luke's Gospel, I want to make sure we bite and digest small morsels to better understand God's character. Thus far, Jesus has introduced us to His Father who holds nothing back to heal those broken in body, mind or spirit; holds nothing back from those who seek a relationship with Him; holds nothing back getting us into His eternal Kingdom

In recent weeks, I am learning more about, **"the power of one"**¹. Jewish sages ask why God created only one man², why not fifty or more? *Answer:* To teach us the power of one person.

One God, who created one human from whom civilisation grew. One person disobeyed God leading to death, and One person restored us to life through His own voluntary death and resurrection. Reflecting on this, the sages said, *"He who saves one life, saves an entire world."*

As God's hand-made creation, each person holds God's infinite potential, and each person's life, words and actions are powerful enough to influence another's life, for good or bad!

Jesus' story starts with two short parables about society's most invisible members: *shepherds and women*. Both involve a **rest-less** recovery, followed by a **seemingly** reckless celebration.

Last Sunday, Jesus framed the first of two parables to teach us the immensity of God's love for the one walking astray, one lost, one misdirected, one unable to save itself.

Our reading today starts with a woman who has lost one silver coin out of her savings of ten. She is distraught: she lights a lamp and she sweeps the entire house, i.e., she is not rummaging around, she is on a mission! She knows she has not been careless; it is lost to her, in her house. In her society, and understood by those around her, the 10 silver coins was not

¹ A book by Bryce Courtenay and a film by the same name starring Stephen Dorff and Morgan Freeman.

² In the Talmud, the book in which the Rabbis engage theology with faith. (The central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law (*halakha*) and Jewish theology).

for her to spend on herself, it belonged to her next generation, it was their inheritance and she was focussed on finding the lost silver coin, the same focus with which the man with a hundred sheep went after the one lost - **committed to finding it**, *until he the shepherd and she the woman, found what was lost.*

Note carefully three things: the celebration that followed was the natural result of, not only finding, but recovering and restoring what was lost; not one word of repentance was mentioned: neither sheep nor coins are able to repent; finally the power of **ONE**, the **one** who searches, who scours relentlessly, until the **one** lost is found.

I love the phrase, *there is joy in the presence of God's angels*, a picture of angels waiting for a big party!

The focus of Jesus' object lesson begins in verse 11. *To illustrate the point further...* What that point is, we need to discover in this **one** story.

The scene shifts to the home of an affluent family. *A man had two sons.*

This would have resonated with the audience³, *Does He have some-thing to say about Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob.* I have heard it said, this was the perfect family. The elder of the two inherits 2/3 of the father estate, because he had the responsibility of looking after the entire family after the father's death, which included everyone the father looked after in the extended family, widows, minor children, any infirm, sick and disabled. The elder son appears dutiful, obedient, a good steward, *never once refused to do a single thing you Father, told me to do.*

The younger son makes a sudden declaration, *'I want my share of your estate now, before you die.'* Clearly, this son does not feel he belongs in the family. Maybe he is the only one with ginger hair, or his older brother was domineering and told him he was good-for-nothing ... something

³ Pharisees and Teachers of the Law

triggered him to choose his words, ...*my share ... your estate ...now ... before you die.*

For a lad to stake claim to his inheritance, is to say, *Dad! I wish you were dead; that's the only way I can get my inheritance!*

A very hurtful thing to say and nothing should compel the Father to grant his request. The Father appears recklessly indulgent in agreeing to His son's request, and *in a few days* gives the son his 1/3 share of the entire estate, and the boy is off to the races!

This is God's nature and His character: we live in this world, the home He made for us. We enjoy His creation, but we don't want the terms and conditions attached to living here. *Thank you Daddy, I don't need You to look after me. Cut me loose. I can look after myself!* And God's response? *If that is what you want, feel free to leave.* The Father did **not** say, *Now leave my house and never let your shadow darken its entrance.* God does not tie us down, nor bind us with guilt; we are free to leave anytime, taking with us, "our share of **His** estate"!! We can leave Him without a word of gratitude, without saying good-bye, and without looking back.

The lad spends all his wealth, hits rock bottom, **longing** to eat what unclean animals eat. A trio of calamities hit him: *decadent living* squandered his resources, a *severe famine*, and social neglect in which *no one gave him anything*. Being socially ostracised is the worst thing to happen to anyone, *the feeling, I don't belong here.* God never says that to anyone, and we are cautioned not to make anyone feel they don't belong. Someone told me a few weeks ago, *You are not English...* I had to agree, but reminded them, *I am British and have been so for a very long time. My grandfather and father carried British passports!*

Ashamed of who he had become, remembering what he enjoyed in his father's home, the lad repents and makes his way back home.

Remember, this is a parable by which Jesus wants to convey God's character; what happens next is crucial to our understanding of God.

While the son was a speck on the horizon, his Father saw him coming. On the day of his departure, his Father watched him go until he dropped off the horizon; His lookout never ceased, and now He recognises His son as a speck on the horizon.

Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his Son, embraced and kissed him. This is the core of God's character: His love for us, created with His own hands and in whom He breathed His own Spirit, how can He not have compassion for the state we are in.

A few weeks ago we said, repentance is not about looking back and grovelling over the past; repentance is about facing God's future and working towards what God has planned. This Father is not interested in the son's confession and repentance. He is so overjoyed His lost son has returned and been found alive, He cannot wait to give the order to get the party going! The Father has been preparing for this event, *Don't forget the fattened lamb!*, he shouts!

The older son returns from a day on the family farm, hears the noise and music of a party, and **asks one of the servants**, *What is going on?* He could have gone into the house, but interestingly he does not feel like its his house. He has to ask one of the domestic staff, and when His Father comes running out to usher him in, the elder son rebukes Him, *all these years I have slaved for you... now YOUR son, ... who squandered YOUR money...*

The Father ran to meet, greet hug and kiss His son who squandered his share of the family estate, now the Father runs out to meet and beg the elder son to join in the celebration.

Jesus the Master Storyteller, casts the story of two sons, brining together three parables. Like the one sheep who went astray, one son left the

family home and was lost to the world, and like the one coin lost in the family home, the older son was lost in his own home, not knowing the security he enjoyed, including his Father's love.

To build our relationship with the Father, each of us must identify with one of two questions:

- are we are lost in the world, to the world, with a faint memory of the joy and security of our Father's house? **or**
- are we are lost in our Father's house, unaware of the joy and privileges that are ours to enjoy, because we really don't know the Father, and we don't enjoy a relationship with him, that we ask others, *What's the party all about?*

God lost us to the enemy the day we fell for the question, *Did God really say...?*, and has been on a mission to recover and restore us who are lost to him. To His enemy God says, *this son/daughter of mine was dead and now returned to life. (S)he was lost, but now is found.*

Like the older son, some of us feel we deserve better than those *n'er-do-good* types, God says, *this your brother (sister) was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found! Come join the party and let's rejoice and celebrate together!*

The story ends on these words of unbridled joy from the Father's heart. We don't know what the elder son does, but that is the question: so many of us are like the older brother, lost to God the Father because we have not taken time to build a relationship with Him, and we miss out not knowing who we are in His great family.

What will we do?

What **will** we do?

AMEN.