



THE LOST SONS

People often look at the parables of Jesus as morality tales – kids’ stories designed to help us understand right from wrong. Now apart from the fact that some of them warrant a 15-Cert movie-rating, they are so much more than that. These stories are a window into the very heart of God – how God sees the world; how God sees us. And this one, perhaps more than any other, gives us insight into how much God loves us.

It’s the story, not of the lost son, but of the lost *sons*.

Luke 15:11-32

According to dads at MFC, being a dad means ...

Changing the world, one little person at a time.

Never being able to find the TV remote when you need it.

You can fix anything (in theory, anyway)!

Toasting marshmallows and camping in the woods.

Always putting your hand in your pocket.

Running a voluntary taxi-service in your spare time.

Knowing when to say "Ask your mum."

You don't know what it's like to be a child! (Apparently.)

Having an excuse to play with toys again!

Always being there, even when your kids screw up.

Loving them enough to let them go.

Being a parent is one of God's greatest blessings to us, but it can break your heart, too. As happens in this story.

Because in this story there's a man. And this man has 2 sons:

1) A Younger, Disobedient Son. The younger son asks for his share of his dad's inheritance. Now traditionally this would have been given when the father died, so this was like saying, "You're dead to me. This is all you're worth."

How do you think that dad would have felt? Pretty devastated?

In spite of that, he 'divides his property' (or literally 'life'), sells a chunk of it, and gives it to his son. And the son heads off on a voyage of self-discovery, hits the bars and casinos and brothels, and squanders the lot. Then, as he reaches his last shekel, a famine hits, the boy has nothing to live on, and he ends up feeding pigs (the lowest of the low for a good Jewish boy). And it's at this point (the centre of his story) that he 'comes to himself.' He realises his only hope is to return to his father and offer himself as a servant.

So the boy begins his journey home, expecting a harsh reception. But as he reaches the edge of town, there is his dad, waiting for him. Why is his father waiting on the edge of town? According to OT Law, this boy deserves to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). But the father loves him *so much* he is standing there, waiting to save him – and if necessary, to take the stones for him.

He is willing to die for his son.

So, the father sees his son, gathers up his robes, runs to him (a shameful thing for an old man to do), and with tears in his eyes, he holds him as tight as he can, and kisses him. Then he gives him a robe, a signet ring, and sandals (all signs of honour), a fatted calf, and a party to boot. And everyone's eating and drinking and singing and dancing.

Everyone, that is, apart from one.

2) An Older, Obedient Son. We can easily forget there are 2 sons in this story (many do), and in the process, miss something so, so important. Because to Jesus' original listeners, this boy would have been the hero. This boy is a good son, a responsible son, the kind of son they would have been encouraged to be as they were growing up.

But in reality, this son is just as lost as the other.

You see, this older son, he also brings shame on his father – by refusing to attend the party. He can't even address him as 'Dad!' And OK, he's stuck around and worked hard all these years. But why? Is it because he loves his dad? Maybe. Is it out of a sense of duty? Possibly. Or is it because he thinks he can earn the inheritance his brother got for nothing? Probably!

Just look at the language he uses:

"All these years ..."

"I've been slaving ..."

"Never disobeyed your orders ..."

And he never even got a goat! I.e. he thinks his father's love is something to be earned. Like most of the world's religions (and yes, even some Christians).

But look at the father's reply: "My child, you are always with me (always right here, in my heart). And everything – *everything* – I have is yours." I.e. "I love you both the same." The point being: true love *cannot* be earned – and that is especially true of a parent's love. We can either accept it, or reject it. But we can do nothing to earn it.

So 1 father, 2 sons. And a whole lot of daddy-issues! But what's the meaning of this story? What's the moral here?

The Moral Of The Story ...

Firstly, it says something about us. Whether we're religious or irreligious, spiritual or unspiritual, there is a disconnect between us and God. Like the sons in this story, we have ...

Insulted Him.

Resented Him.

Broken His heart.

And it's true of all of us, whether or not we do the organised religion thing. We might think we've got it sorted, but we're all screwed up. In our badness. And our goodness.

But that's not all. It also says something about God. That He's a dad unlike any other, yes. But on top of that, that He loves us all, to the point where, in Jesus, He ...

Took our pride.

Took our shame.

Took the consequences.

It's a picture of the love of Jesus, a love that was shown on that cross on Calvary Hill, 2000 years ago. In Jesus' eyes we have all wandered away – *all* of us. But no matter who we are, where we come from, or what we've done, Jesus loves us, was willing to die for us, and is waiting for us to come home. You might be thinking, "But Steve, you don't know what I'm like, what I've said and done." This is true. But Jesus does, and the message is the same: "Nothing you have done – good or bad - can ever change My love for you. *Nothing*. But until you come home, you will never know."

Question is: which son are *you*?

And have you made that journey home yet?