

# Ears to Hear

*Getting to the Point of the Parables*

## 4. Sheep, Silver and Sons

*The Parable of the Lost*

Luke 15v 1-32

*“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”*

– Matthew 13v 34

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

[www.sladebrook.org.uk](http://www.sladebrook.org.uk)

## **Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:**

*It is estimated that in the synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) around one third of Jesus' words are found in His parables. If then, we are really interested in understanding Jesus; how He thought and taught, then we would do well to look at these penetrative illustrations more closely.*

*Yet it is sad to so often hear parables talked about in such a bland and predictable way. Western Christians have not only sought to instantly spiritualise the parables, but to sanitise them also. This is both tragic and ironic. The parables carry force, humour and an uncomfortably subversive message within their short, but devastating storylines.*

*In order for us not only to understand the parables, but also to hear the heart of Christ's teaching, we must return to Biblical times; unravel our well-worn, but often misinformed opinions and take our place not only within the culture but also the crowds of Jesus' day. Only then can we hope to hear His valiant voice and feel the force of the parables. The aim of this series is just that.*

*Scripture's message is a timeless one, yet its voice is all but lost if we simply jump to our own cultural conclusions and force the parables to fit our own situation. Only a rigorous, prayerful approach can yield the rich rewards contained within the parables: We must ask what was going on in Israel at the time of Christ, socially, spiritually and economically? The answers to these and other questions help us to contextualise the rather lurid backdrops that Jesus paints as He makes His parabolic points. Why Jesus spoke in such memorable ways is intriguing and of great importance to us all. There are lessons to learn and lives to be touched for the cause of Christ and the parables point the way He would have us go.*

*This series finds its title from the words of Christ Himself: If we truly have "ears to hear," we will approach these studies with humility, diligence and an expectancy that the parables of Jesus might leap of the sacred page and into our hearts, not simply so we get the point, but rather that we might also go on to live in the light of the lessons they so vividly teach us.*

*Do you have ears to hear? Then get into the point of the parables!*

***"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." - Luke 8v 8***

### Sheep, Silver and Sons: The Parable of the Lost

*The running dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees is evident in all four Gospels. This clash between the law-abiding religious establishment and Jesus' "new and living way" couldn't be more extreme. Such fractious exchanges would continue to characterize, indeed polarize Jesus against the Pharisees all the way to the cross.*

*On one side, the Pharisees seemingly stood for what was right: Their diligent desire to uphold the law and honor the traditions of Israel was not wrong in principle, but this desire had deadened their hearts and a harsh legality crept in. The integrity and intentions within the limits of the Law had been reduced to nitpicking as the Pharisees jostled for position before God. Standing in stark contrast to this was Jesus with His extravagant claims and welcoming heart. The untouchables, the pariahs, the sinners and all who would embrace the brave new world that He had come to proclaim were drawn irresistibly to Christ. The good news Jesus brought exposed the brittle underbelly of the law keepers and their outmoded pressure to conform. Shockingly, Jesus was not only welcoming sinners, but eating with them too! This Divine host invited the failing and the feeble, all falling far short of the law's steely standards, to enjoy instead the grace and wonder of God's unconditional love. The lost were now being found.*

*The mutterings of the Pharisees prompted Jesus to speak again in parables. Luke 15 is arguably three parables, but more likely one devastating section in which Jesus speaks cryptically, but compellingly to challenge the heart of this social/spiritual divide: Who is "in" and who is "out" when it comes to sinners and saints? Does love or law prevail? In the parable of the lost, Christ confirms that those who are afar off, can come closer to God than they ever imagined, whilst those who thought they were already there, may just be further away than they realized.*

#### **Each week – Getting to the Point of the Parables:**

*A simple way of studying parables could include these 3 questions:*

***Look at the Picture in the Parable: What is Jesus describing?***

***Listen to the Punch line of the Parable: What is Jesus saying?***

***Learn from the Purpose of the Parable: What is Jesus expecting?***

## **Read: Luke 15v 1-32**

**Key words:** Sinners, Pharisees, lost, repents, rejoicing, found

- **Lost Sheep: and a Dramatic Shepherd – 15v 3-7**  
*Jesus speaks of a shepherd who goes to great lengths to find his lost sheep. The drama unfolds and they return with a call to rejoice.*
- **Lost Silver: and a Diligent Woman -15v8-10**  
*As Jesus makes His point, He describes a woman, equally industrious in seeking her lost coin and celebrating its discovery.*
- **Lost Sons: and a Devoted Father – 15v 11-32**  
*Finally Jesus challenges the Pharisees: Who is really lost? He compares the actions of two sons in the light of their father's love.*

## **Ears to Hear?**

- **How dramatic are you?**  
*There is something kamikaze about this shepherd! How are we to interpret his approach when we think of reaching people? How far are you prepared to go to reach one lost soul? Is our evangelism to safe at Sladebrook? How can we go further in reaching out to others?*
- **How diligent are you?**  
*Why do you think Jesus effectively retold the first parable again? What, if anything, is different? How actively do you search for lost people? What lessons can we draw from this woman's approach?*
- **How devoted are you?**  
*The Father's heart is key to understanding God's perspective in this parable. Describe his actions and attitudes. How does your devotion to prodigals (especially those who may have wronged you) show itself?*

*Think of some practical ways in which a local church should extend the Father's heart to a lost world. How are we doing this at Sladebrook?*