

Episode: One-Hit Wonders No. 5

Narrator: Big Brother

Primary Scriptures: Luke 15:11-32

Story Summary: Jesus tells the story of a wayward son

Location: Israel

Time: Circa 29 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Luke 15: 24, 32

Luke is the only Gospel writer who records this story, which Luke includes as part of a trilogy of stories about lost things. Jesus told these stories in response to the religious leaders complaining about Jesus being in the company of tax collectors and sinners. The stories clearly relate the message that God highly values those who are lost and wants to bring them back into relationship with him.

The first of the stories, or parables, is about a lost sheep. The shepherd leaves his ninety-nine other sheep to find the lost one. The punch line to the story is Jesus saying that there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one lost sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

The second story is about a widow who loses one of her ten precious silver coins. This time, the punch line is that the angels in the presence of God will rejoice over one sinner who repents. These first two stories were short, but must have made the religious leaders very uncomfortable. That feeling was about to intensify.

The third story is about a lost son. This story is also known as the Prodigal Son. "Prodigal" means to spend money or resources recklessly or lavishly. The title given to the story was meant to describe the way the son lived, while the real point of the story is that God is prodigal with the way he treats lost people.

The story starts with one of two sons going to their father and asking for his inheritance before the father died. This was tantamount to wishing the father would die and was a humiliating insult to the father, the family, and the larger community. Though the son doesn't deserve it, the father gives him his share of the inheritance, while making it clear that everything left belongs to the other, older son.

After the younger son wastes his money and resources, he has to take the insulting job of feeding pigs. After nearly starving to death, he chooses to return to his father and ask to be treated as a servant-slave. The father forgives the son and celebrates the son's return with a feast. Jesus could have ended the story there, along with his previous observation about angels celebrating the repentance of a lost person. That would have fit the trilogy perfectly.

However, Jesus chose to end the story by insulting the religious leaders who tended to ignore the sinners of society. He did that by having the big brother act in an insulting way to the father, even though he already owned everything the father had.