

“Parable of the Prodigal Son”

Introduction – Luke 15:11-32

Today we look at one of the most recognizable parables of Jesus. So let’s start by the understanding of who these three characters in this story represent.

1. **THE FATHER** is representing God who in this parable longs for his son who has a willful departure from his father’s house to spend his inheritance on wild living to come back home. He lovingly forgives!
2. **THE YOUNGER SON** is representative of the tax collectors and sinners about whom chapter 15 begins referring to them as the people who were responding to Jesus’ message of repentance and forgiveness.
3. **THE OLDER SON** is representative of the self-righteous religious leaders and teachers for the law who looked down on everyone else.

The major theme of this parable is not centered on the conversion of sinners like the previous two parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin but rather the restoration of a believer who walks away from the relationship they have with the father. In the first two parables, the owner went to look for that which was lost, whereas in this story the father waits and watches eagerly for his son’s return. We see a progression through these three parables in Luke 15. From the seeking of 1 in a 100, to 1 in 10, to 1 in 1, demonstrating God’s love for each individual! We need to take this to heart for God’s love for us!

John 3:16-17 (NIV)

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Matthew 1:21 (NIV)

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Luke 19:10 (NIV)

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

I. THE YOUNGER SON

Luke 15:11-19 (NIV)

11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. **13** “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. **17** “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’”

The younger son asks his father for his share of his estate, which would have been half of what the older son would receive. So basically one-third. Though it was within his rights to ask, it was not a very loving thing to do. It implied that he wished his father was dead. Instead of reprimanding his son, the father grants him his free-will request. This is a picture of God letting a sinner go his own way. As Moses set before the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (NIV)

19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live **20** and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

So applying this to ourselves we can all possess selfish ambition, to want to do things my way (as Frank Sinatra sung! 😊) We buy into the lies that Satan sets before us that a life of sin is going to be happy and fulfilling.

Scripture tells us:

Hebrews 11:25 (NIV)

25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

There is fun for a while but the enemy of our souls doesn't want us to see what sin does to us:

Hebrews 3:12-13 (NIV)

12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. **13** But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

And we are warned of what it does in the end:

James 1:13-15 (NIV)

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; **14** but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. **15** Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

We don't take God's word to heart! We don't heed Jesus' warnings:

Luke 12:15 (NIV)

15 THEN HE SAID TO THEM, "WATCH OUT! BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL KINDS OF GREED; A MAN'S LIFE DOES NOT CONSIST IN THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS POSSESSIONS."

So the younger son sets off on his journey to do what he thinks is going to make him happy. **HE NOW DOES PHYSICALLY WHAT HAS BEEN IN HIS HEART!** He travels to a distant country to do all that he thought would be fun and fulfilling. He squandered all his wealth and loses everything! His financial disaster is followed by a natural disaster in the form of a famine. So things go from bad to worse. He gets so desperate he goes to a gentile farmer for a job of feeding pigs; a horrible job for a Jewish boy! He wasn't paid much and became desperate enough to want to eat the pig's food. Where were his friends? When your money runs out in these situations so do your quote "friends" become nowhere to be found.

The prodigal, lost son is a picture to us as that of a lost sinner or a rebellious Christian who has returned to a life of sin:

II Peter 2:19-22 (NIV)

19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. **20** If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. **21** It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. **22** Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

It's at this rock bottom point that he begins to realize what a mess he has made of his life! He decides to return to his father, humbly, broken and sorry for what he has done! As Paul shared with the Corinthians:

II Corinthians 7:9-10 (NIV)

9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. **10** Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

The younger son's realization that he needed to come back to his father was the only solution for him!

He returns home and begs his father for forgiveness! He surrenders all! He just wants to be a servant! Oh, how this parallels our coming to faith in Jesus!

II. THE FATHERS RESPONSE

Luke 15:20-24 (NIV)

20 So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. **21** "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' **22** "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

The father was longing for his sons return! He runs to his wayward, rebellious son! He embraces him and kisses him! In Jesus' day it was not customary for a grown man to run, yet; the father shows

His love and desire for reconciliation! Oh, what a picture this is for us as we run to the Lord for reconciliation and forgiveness!

Listen to these passages:

Zechariah 3:1-7 (NIV)

1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. 2 The Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?” 3 **NOW JOSHUA WAS DRESSED IN FILTHY CLOTHES AS HE STOOD BEFORE THE ANGEL. 4 THE ANGEL SAID TO THOSE WHO WERE STANDING BEFORE HIM, “TAKE OFF HIS FILTHY CLOTHES.” THEN HE SAID TO JOSHUA, “SEE, I HAVE TAKEN AWAY YOUR SIN, AND I WILL PUT RICH GARMENTS ON YOU.” 5 THEN I SAID, “PUT A CLEAN TURBAN ON HIS HEAD.” SO THEY PUT A CLEAN TURBAN ON HIS HEAD AND CLOTHED HIM, WHILE THE ANGEL OF THE LORD STOOD BY.** 6 The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua: 7 “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.

Here we see a beautiful picture of restoration in the face of hellish accusations and attacks!

Listen to these scriptures on God’s forgiveness:

I John 1:8-9 (NIV)

8 IF WE CLAIM TO BE WITHOUT SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US. 9 IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST AND WILL FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND PURIFY US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

Psalm 32:1-7 (NIV)

1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. **2** Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. **3** When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. **4** For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah **5** Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah **6** Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. **7** You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah

Psalm 51:1-12 (NIV)

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. **2** Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. **3** For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. **4** Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. **5** Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. **6** Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. **7** Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. **8** Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. **9** Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. **10** Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. **11** Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. **12** Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Psalm 103:8-18 (NIV)

8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. **9** He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; **10** he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. **11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is

his love for those who fear him; **12** as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. **13** As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; **14** for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. **15** As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; **16** the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. **17** But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—**18** with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

Isaiah 42:25 (NIV)

25 SO HE Poured OUT ON THEM HIS BURNING ANGER, THE VIOLENCE OF WAR. IT ENVELOPED THEM IN FLAMES, YET THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND; IT CONSUMED THEM, BUT THEY DID NOT TAKE IT TO HEART.

Hebrews 8:12 (NIV)

12 FOR I WILL FORGIVE THEIR WICKEDNESS AND WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."

The feast prepared represents the joy in heaven when we sinners come to repentance! Oh, the joy of forgiveness and God's amazing grace, mercy and love! His restoration of us and "working all things together for God"! (reference Romans 8:28)

III. THE OLDER SON

Luke 15:25-32 (NIV)

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' **28** "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you

and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ **31** “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

The older son’s response reveal several things! Remember this represents the religious leaders, the pharisees, the teachers of the law, the self-righteous among us:

1. His relationship with the father was based on works. He points out that he’s always been obedient and slaving away, so where’s his party? He deserves it?
2. He despises his younger brother as undeserving of his father’s favor.
3. He does not understand grace and has no room for forgiveness! He’s actually angry about it!
4. He has disowned his younger brother referring to him as this “son of yours”.
5. He believes his father is stingy and unfair to him. “You kill the fattened calf for him” but never gave me a young goat!

Listen to the father’s words to correct him.

1. He points out that their relationship is not based on performance “you are always with me” and everything I have is “yours”!
2. He points out he should accept his brother as part of the family. “this brother of yours”
3. The older son could have had a party anytime he would have chose but he never utilized the blessings at his disposal.
4. Grace is very necessary and appropriate “we had to celebrate”.

Conclusion

Oh, how we need to also take these words to heart on how we respond to people coming from rough backgrounds! We need to lovingly accept them as members in the body of Christ! To utilize their talents and abilities. Yes, we need to train and disciple! To give time for maturing and demonstrating the reality of the conversion experience of coming to Jesus and His church!

But God help us to not be like the religious leaders of Jesus' day who had this attitude:

Luke 18:9-14 (NIV)

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: **10** “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ **13** “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ **14** “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Let's take all this to heart!