

Prodigal Week #4

12.19.21

Luke 15:11–32 (CSB)

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

¹¹He also said, “A man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.’ So he distributed the assets to them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. ¹⁵Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything. ¹⁷When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.” ’ ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. ²¹The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²²“But the father told his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, ²⁴because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵“Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. ²⁷‘Your brother is here,’ he told him, ‘and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ "Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he replied to his father, 'Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.'

³¹ " 'Son,' he said to him, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

Introduction: To what extent will God go to restore what was lost?

A. Each of these three parables paint one picture:

1. God will go to great lengths to save what is lost.
2. The Shepherd would search the wilderness for one lost sheep.
3. The woman will scour the house to find a lost coin.
4. The Father will suffer humiliation to restore lost sons to the family.

B. This story isn't focused upon the lost son.

1. The spotlight of history has been on the son.
2. But Jesus focuses uniquely upon the father.

C. Today, I hope to draw our attention to some unfamiliar facets of this familiar story.

1. Regardless if you are more like the younger son or the older son, the reality is that the Father loves both.
2. Not only does He love both, both are in need of a loving father that is willing to grant a gift that is so extravagant and unexpected that it can honestly be described as prodigal.

1. I wish you were dead!

A. The youngest son asks for his portion.

1. This portion (1/3 of the estate) was his.

2. And it would be his to use as he sees fit, once his father died.
3. But that isn't what the younger son wants.
4. He wants it now, effectively wishing that his father was dead.

B. At this point, there is only one appropriate response for the father.

1. In that culture, the only response was to punish the son.
2. The father had every right to beat the son, kill the son, and embarrass the son.
 - a. The OT called for the son's death by stoning.
 - b. The culture called for the son to be excommunicated, effectively cause him to be dead to the family.

3. But the Father acts scandalously.

- a. We are so familiar with the story that we miss the scandal.
- b. Not only that, we read our own culture into it.
- c. In our culture it often appears that the kids hold all the power, and the parents act for the kid's will and desire.
- d. Not the case in Jesus' day.

C. Jesus' audience would have never expected the father to give the son what he asked for.

1. But he does.
2. In this sense, Jesus is testifying of the freewill that every person has.
 - a. The younger son asks to live in sin, and he gets it.
 - b. Later, the older brother is invited to rejoice and celebrate with the father, but the choice is up to him.
3. The freewill of humanity is an expression of God's love to His creation.

4. God gave us freewill because He wanted sons and daughters, not just slaves.

2. The son then squanders the inheritance.

A. The estate was not cash.

1. It was flocks, and property, and servants, and other assets.
2. So guess what the son has to do: He sells it cheaply.
3. He then goes and squanders it in a foreign country.

B. At this point, I cannot imagine how the father and older brother felt.

1. A 1/3 of the families' wealth is gone.
2. Someone now owns the sheep they were raising.
3. The property beside the house now has new owners.
4. The father and older brother have every right to be angry.

C. All the while, the youngest son is broke.

1. Sin takes us farther than we want to go.
2. Not only is he broke, but he is broke during a famine.
3. He is so broke he cannot afford to eat the pig slop.
4. Here he is, hired to feed pigs and the pigs are eating better than he is.

D. Some of us here can relate to this situation.

1. Have you ever been in a place that one disaster follows another?
2. One sin gateways into another sin, another addiction, another struggle.
3. Before you know it, you are a long way from home.

3. When you are lost, there is no better thought than home.

A. The youngest son begins to think of ways to earn his way home.

1. He doesn't plan on coming home as a son.
2. He hopes to come home as a servant.
3. Perhaps, if he works hard enough, he can repay back his father and brother for what he has lost.
4. If he can someday pay them back, that will forgive everything.

B. Too many of us are content being servants, when we are called to be sons.

1. Sure, Scripture uses servant language to describe what we do.
 - a. We are all called to be servants to God.
 - b. We are either slaves to sin or slaves to God.
2. But that is one facet of our identity.
 - a. The oldest brother worked, but that didn't make him a servant.
 - b. We see that the oldest son was out supervising in the fields.
 - c. But that didn't mean he wasn't a son.

C. All of the youngest sons sins, mistakes, and failures led him to believe that the way home was to earn everything back.

1. But when the son approached the village, he realized that it wasn't work or law that the Father wanted.
2. It was relationship.
3. Yet, the son was afraid to come home.

4. Why was the son afraid to come home?

A. The Jews had a ceremony for people like this younger son.

...there was a well-known Jewish ceremony called the 'kezazah ceremony.' If a son ever behaved in the manner equivalent to the son

in Jesus' story, wishing his father dead by asking for an early inheritance, and then tried to return home to his father and community that he had humiliated, then the people of that village would give the son a taste of his own medicine. They would line up on the threshold of the village, and once the son was standing at the same threshold, they would take a clay pot and smash it at the feet of the returning son. This was a symbolic way of saying that the relationship between the son and the community was like the clay pot, broken and irredeemable. The word *kezazah* meant to 'cut off,' and through this brutal ceremony the son was cut off from the community, with no hope for a return.ⁱ

1. The audience listening to Jesus knew what would happen.
2. They just knew the Father would reject the son.
3. They knew that the people would go to the edge of town and berate the son, shame the son, and make sure that he knew that he was not wanted anymore.
4. The son has no hope of returning as a son, so he hopes to be a servant.

B. The father removed the fear of coming home.

1. This is why the Father runs to the son.
2. If he doesn't, the son will be humiliated.
 - a. He must get to him before the village does.
 - b. The Father must go out just as soon as he sees the son, otherwise the son will leave in shame and disgrace.
 - c. SO, the Father runs.

C. Men of stature in those days wore robes. Not good for running. No one enters a marathon with a full, ankle-length robe.

1. Lift up the front and expose his knees, something considered shameful.
2. In order for the son to return home, someone had to experience the shame.

- a. What was done was wrong.
- b. There was a price to be paid.
- c. Most of us would have made the son beg for mercy.
- d. Instead, the Father took upon himself the curse of the village and the sin of the son so that he could have a son and not a servant.

3. There comes a time when an emotion so dominates your heart that you forget everything.¹

- a. Do you see that this is exactly what Jesus did?
- b. Scripture declared that cursed is any man who hangs on a tree.

- 1. Jesus hung there to carry our shame.
- 2. We could have never returned ourselves to the relationship with God.
- 3. But God sought us out while we were yet sinners.

D. "The servants are there on the road with the father. The father turns to them and orders them to dress the boy as a son. He doesn't say to the boy, "Go, clean up, shave, and get some decent clothes on." Rather he orders the servants to bring the best robe and dress him. They are to honor him as a son of the house.

- 1. The "best robe" is naturally the father's finest robe.
- 2. The prodigal will attend the banquet attired in his father's most elegant robe. The guests that night will recognize the robe and treat him in a respectful manner because of the clothes he is wearing. They will understand that he has been fully restored to sonship.

¹ J. D. Greear, "[The Love of God for You: Luke 15:11-32](#)," in *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive* (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017), Lk 15:11-32.

3. When you accept Jesus as your Savior, what does Scripture say about your “robes”?

- a. He clothes us in righteousness.
- b. Our righteousness is like filthy rags, that is why we don't wear our own robes.
- c. The clothes the son returned in smelled like the world, not like home.
- d. They smelled like the pigsty, but the best robe smelled like the Father.

But there is more:

E. The father gives the son the signet ring.

- 1. The ring is most likely the signet ring of the house.
- 2. It represented the family, and the father's approval.
- 3. Isn't it amazing how, **in God's Kingdom, we go from deadbeats to ambassadors in an instant?**
- 4. We go from feeding the pigs to wearing the father's ring.

F. The father told the servants “to put the sandals on his feet.”

- 1. To have shoes on his feet may also be a symbol of his new rank.
- 2. “Slaves go barefoot. Sons wear shoes.”
- 3. The son's walk from the edge of the village to the house could not have been anymore different than what he expected.
 - a. He hoped to be a servant, instead he remained a son.
 - b. He expected humiliation: instead he received honor.
 - c. He thought he might have to crawl on hands and knees: instead he walked in the shoes of the household.

5. Therefore, The son must accept being found.

A. Islam interprets this parable as proving there is no need for a cross, a resurrection, or Jesus.

1. Indeed, if the Prodigal “coming to himself” means that he changes his own life, and fixes his own problem, the truth is that he does not need a savior.

2. But “salvation” doesn’t happen in the faraway country. It happens in the Father’s embrace.

B. **Cleaning your life up is not the same as being saved.**

1. Leaving old friends behind isn’t the same as accepting Christ’s love for you.

2. The Lost son stayed lost until the Father forgave and embraced the son.

3. Some of us here today try to live clean lives, yet we are still lost.

a. It isn’t our goodness that saves us, but accepting Christ’s goodness.

b. It isn’t about what I’ve done for Jesus, but what Jesus has done for me.

C. **The Problem was never the lost money, but the broken relationship.**

1. So often we focus on the money.

a. In fact, the name “prodigal son” focuses on what the son spent.

b. But it wasn’t about the money; it was the relationship.

c. The sin was not in breaking the law, but breaking the heart of the father.

2. The father throws a party without counting the cost.

a. The fattened calf, the lost property, the giving of the robes and ring all demonstrate that it wasn't about the money.

b. Some of us here today struggle because all we can see is the cost of our sin.

1. The people we've hurt.

2. The damage we've done.

3. The pain we've caused.

4. We cannot wait until we are perfect to come to Jesus.

5. The greatest news ever given is that God doesn't require us to come to as perfect people.

6. Instead, while we are still terribly imperfect, Jesus comes seeking us.

6. Accepting God's Prodigal Gift is hard for us.

A. Both sons struggle with this gift of the father.

1. The oldest son cannot handle this kind of love either.

2. He resents his brother AND he resents his father's actions.

3. **Until the eldest brother sees his own need for love and salvation, he can never love the younger brother.**

B. Some of us here are like the younger brother.

1. We've lived a life that we aren't too proud of.

2. For the younger brothers, receiving love is hard.

3. The struggle to forgive yourself and receive forgiveness is incredibly difficult.

a. One moment you seem to be making progress.

b. The next moment, all the same and guilt comes back upon you.

c. But today I remind you that you don't save yourself.

d. You have to accept being saved.

C. For the older brothers, the ones who never run-off or waste anything, we must be reminded that we are saved the same way as our younger brothers.

1. It is possible to have never run away and yet still be totally lost.

2. And because you don't understand love, you do not want anyone else to be loved either.

Prayer

ⁱ Hughes, Pete. *All Things New: Joining God's Story of Re-Creation*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2020.