

March 5, 2023

“The Prodigal Son”
Lesson 1

Luke 15:11-24

Intro

Today begins our Spring Quarter lessons, with the theme “Jesus Calls Us.” This month’s theme is “Called From the Margins of Society.” We will be studying people and situations where the ones involved are considered on the outside, not the center or the best of society.

Today’s lesson is the parable of The Prodigal Son. It’s the third parable in Luke 15, the other two about a lost sheep and a lost coin. All three parables have the same parts: 1) something is lost, 2) the lost thing is found, and 3) celebration ensues. Jesus told these parables in response to criticism from the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They disliked that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. Eating with someone was a sign of acceptance. Jesus was establishing contact and acceptance of these sinners before they had sought the “proper” means of forgiveness according to the law. This fits Jesus’ purpose to “seek and save the lost”.

Read Luke 15:11-24

1. vs. 11: Jesus says “There was a man who had two sons”

Not giving the characters names indicates that this is a parable, not a story with real people

2. vs. 12: The younger son asks his father for his share of the estate.

As with our wills today, the estate doesn’t usually get allotted until after the father’s death

Our text brings out a view I hadn’t considered before:

“The younger son’s request...was effectively saying, “Father, I wish you were dead.”

This attitude makes the son look even worse than the story usually portrays him

Under the Law of Moses, the oldest son would get a double portion of the inheritance

Either son’s portion could include land, a house, or other items of wealth

The son’s request implies great dishonor toward his father and a rebellious attitude

The Law gave harsh consequences for a rebellious and stubborn son (Deut.21:18-21)

But the father doesn’t respond according to the letter of the law; he shows grace and mercy

3. vs. 13: The son’s rebellious attitude is amplified in this verse

He gathers up **all** he has and leaves

He goes to “a distant country”

Both of these indicate that he didn’t intend to return

He physically distanced himself from his father, his family, and his people

He “squanders” or “wastes” his wealth in “wild living”

Vs. 30 indicates that his money was spent on prostitutes

The son has gone to increasingly greater steps which bring shame to himself and his family

He demands his inheritance early

He takes his things and moves far away

He spends his money in pursuing a shameful lifestyle

4. vs. 14: A famine happens where the son lives, which brings up unexpected problems
He “began to be in need”
During a famine, people usually rely on the generosity of family and friends
This younger son has no social network, no support network, to rely on
He has also spent all his money, so he has no buffer or margin for error
5. vs. 15: He finds a job, feeding pigs for a local citizen
Several things are problematic for him doing this
Pigs were considered as unclean by the Law of Moses
A citizen owning pigs would have to be a non-Jew, a Gentile
The work and who he’s working for show the son how far he has strayed
He has abandoned his family and his heritage
The son has now suffered three levels of shame
He wasted his wealth, became a servant, as has become a feeder of pigs
Jesus’ Jewish audience would likely think the son “got what he deserved”
He brought shame to his father, and now multiple levels of shame are on him
Perhaps they even relate this event to Proverbs 13:25
“The righteous eat to their hearts’ content, but the stomach of the wicked goes hungry.”
6. vs. 16: Whatever food he was getting (purchased or given) wasn’t very good or appealing
“He longed to fill his stomach with (what) ... the pigs were eating”
Their food is more attractive to the son than the food he has access to
The pigs are receiving better care than he is
This son is totally without support, care, or hope
7. vs. 17: The son realizes there is a problem, and knows what it is—his own choices
He “came to his senses”
This phrase indicates he knew what the problem was and felt sorrow for his choices
This is the first step of repentance: knowing one’s actions as the source of error

In contrast to his lack, the son remembers his father’s generosity to his servants
They have “food to spare”
The wheels are turning in his head about what to do
8. vs. 18: The son now formulates a plan to alter his current shameful and needy circumstances
“I will...go back to my father”
He’s going to return to his home, his father and family and culture
He plans what he will say, which comes from a sincere recognition of doing wrong
“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you”
He plans to confess his wrongdoing to both God and his father
He is hoping to receive mercy and help from his father, but not as a son (see vs. 19)
9. vs. 19: He feels he has no right, based on his actions, to consider himself a son anymore
He calls himself “not worthy” to be a son, but maybe good enough to be a servant
He has lost the brashness and rebellious attitude he displayed earlier
He would work daily, have enough to eat, but be reminded daily of his shame

10. vs. 20: So much happens in this verse

“So he got up and went to his father”

The son acts on the repentance he feels in his thought and heart

Going back, doing something, is an act of repentance

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him...”

He was a significant distance away—he wasn’t near the house or in it yet

The father had to be looking for him to see him “a long way off”

He was hoping that this son would “come to his senses” and return

The disrespect shown by the son doesn’t lessen the father’s love for him

“(His father) was filled with compassion for him”

Compassion is described as: “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it”

The father understands the shame the son has, and the hard work of repentance

He is filled with a desire to lessen his son’s burden, even before the son asks

“He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him”

He doesn’t wait for the son to get to the house—the father runs to him

The physical affection shown is proof of the father’s heart toward his son

He is showing grace and mercy and forgiveness

Jesus obviously tells this story to show God’s compassion to humanity (the father)

When we rebel, we wait for us to make the initial turns back toward Him

When we are “still a long way off”, he “runs” to us with love and forgiveness

11. vs. 21: The son here says the things he has purposed and rehearsed saying

“I have sinned, I am not worthy to be your son”

This shows the sincerity of the son’s repentance

He acknowledges his fault, and recognizes the likely cost of rebellion

He is fully prepared to be a servant in his father’s household

12. vs. 22: The father doesn’t let the son finish his prepared speech. He has a plan of his own

The father restores the son to a position of honor

He is given “the best robe” and a ring and sandals

The clothing and the ring were signs of being the son of this father

They give the wearer power and authority

The son was willing to be a servant, with no power or authority

13. vs. 23: The son’s return is reason for a celebration, a feast

The fattened calf was not slaughtered often in Jesus’ time

This is not a common event

The meat from this was more than one family could eat

This means that neighbors would be invited to celebrate with the father

The previous parables (vs. 7, 10), there is a celebration after the lost thing is found

Jesus makes the point that the lost soul who returns causes celebrations in heaven

14. vs. 24: The father’s announcement summarizes the teaching of the story

The son was dead: he had left, disgraced himself, and fell to the bottom

He is alive again: he has repented, come back to home,

This is a reason to celebrate!

Application: This parable tells us about God and how he handles the sinner. He looks for that one to return, and embraces them when they do. We may feel shamefully unworthy, but like the father in the story, God is generous and gives us far more than we know we deserve. This story is a reminder to all about how God loves and forgives, but also reminds us that we need to be loving and forgiving to those who have hurt or offended us, just as the father did to a formerly disrespectful son.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for being loving and merciful and forgiving. It is a joy and a relief to us that you enthusiastically accept us into your family and love us. Help us to show others daily your kindness and generosity that they might also become part of Your family. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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