

## The Prodigal's Father

Luke 15:11-32

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** In Luke chapter 15 Jesus relates three parables focused on finding lost things:
  - A. The parable of the lost sheep: Lk. 15:4-7
  - B. The parable of the lost coin: Lk. 15:8-10
  - C. The parable of the lost son: Lk. 15:11-32
2. These three parables are in response to the criticism Jesus received from the scribes and Pharisees for associating with “*tax collectors and the sinners*”:

**Lk. 15:1-3:** “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’ 3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying:”
3. **3** This last parable of the three, the parable of the lost son, is more often referred to as the parable of the “Prodigal Son” and is one of the better-known parables of our Lord (only in Luke).
  - A. There are three main characters in the parable:
    - (1) The younger son: The prodigal son represents every sinner, because he forsakes the blessings, privileges and protection of his father’s house.
    - (2) The older son: He stays at home and is seemingly a “good son,” but in reality he is selfish, non-spiritual, unmerciful and self-righteous.
      - (a) Ironically, he is just as unacceptable to God, though in a different way than his rebellious younger brother.
      - (b) “In some respects he was thoughtful, responsible, and sober-minded. In other ways, he was egotistical, proud, and unforgiving.” (pp. 836-837)
    - (3) The father: The merciful father. “The father is obviously symbolic of God Himself. The father is the hero and central figure in the story. It is more about him than about the two sons.” (p. 836)
  - B. This parable has been called the “gospel within the gospel” because of the beautiful way in which it presents God’s willingness to forgive sinners.
4. **4** In this lesson I want to focus mostly on the father figure in the parable; let’s examine five things we can learn from *The Prodigal’s Father*.

### II. DISCUSSION:

#### ***An important principle this parable teaches us is...***

1. **5** God respects our free will:
  - A. The younger son demanded his inheritance: “*Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.*” (v. 12)
    - (1) Such a demand was certainly selfish and totally inappropriate (good people don’t demand their inheritance while their parents are still alive!).
    - (2) In fact, the demand by the younger son would have been utterly shameful in Jesus’ day and probably in our day as well.
    - (3) It would be as if the son wished his father was dead so he could enjoy his inheritance.

- B. While it was a rebellious and shameful demand, it was one which the father surprisingly granted: “So he divided to them his livelihood.” (v. 12; sidenote: It appears from the language that the older son also received his inheritance!)
- C. Not only did the father grant the son’s demand, he allowed his son to leave and did not go searching for him to bring him back home against his will (v. 13: “And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country,”).
- (1) The father didn’t grab the younger son by the scruff of his neck and say, “Just where do you think you’re going!”
  - (2) Likewise, God respects our free will.
  - (3) God doesn’t force us to love Him and serve Him!
 

“The question might be raised: ‘Why would the father do this?’ ‘Why would he give everything to such an obviously immature boy?’ The answer can almost certainly be found in the father’s knowledge that this son was bent on leaving and that his heart was somewhere else. Perhaps he could have forcibly kept him home for a time but not forever. And if he had, there was no way to have any kind of good relationship with him. Until the boy’s spirit changed, there was nothing the father could do to stop him or save him.” (Caldwell, p. 838) **Recall beatitudes!**
- D. God informs us of the blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience, but then leaves the choice up to us:
- Deut. 30:19:** “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”
- Josh. 24:15:** “...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. vBut as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
- E. It is not that God does not care about us! Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Matt. 11:28-30
- F. It breaks God’s heart when we depart from His will (**Hos. 11:5-8**), but He allows us to make our own choice (Our choices have consequences! Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

**Another important principle this parable teaches us is...**

2. **6** God has compassion on us:

- A. Compassion is the ability to be touched by the plight of another.
- (1) It is pity or empathy for those who are suffering, with a desire to help them.
  - (2) Another word closely related is “mercy,” which can be described as not giving someone the suffering or punishment they deserve.
- B. The son desired to return to his father, but knew he deserved a severe reprimand, if not punishment; he knew he deserved to be rejected by his father.
- (1) This is why he wanted to ask to be a servant (vv. 17-19: “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”).
  - (2) He mourned over sin (recall Matt. 5:4!) so much, that he felt unworthy to be in his father’s family any longer! He had sunk as low as one could go: rock bottom!
    - (a) Jews could not eat pork (Isa. 65:4; 66:17), much less raise them as livestock!

- (b) This boy was so low he was picking up the leftovers from a pigsty!
- (3) I've shared the gospel with several people who felt they had so sinned as not to deserve God's love, mercy and forgiveness.
- (4) This, and many other passages, shows God's love, mercy and forgiveness is always available if we'll just come to Him on His terms.
- C. We can better appreciate God's mercy and love as we consider the father as he hopes for the prodigal's return: **v. 20:** *"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."*
- (1) Think about that: the father saw the prodigal when *"he was still a great way off."*
- (2) I envision a father that was desperately hoping for the prodigal's return.
- (3) He anxiously watched as he waited and hoped.
- (4) I envision the father pacing back and forth on the front porch or at the front gate; intently gazing into the distance looking for the wayward son.
- (5) He was not sitting in the house in his easy chair with his arms folded in disgust, cursing *"that worthless idiot kid of mine!"*
- D. Note when *"his father saw him he had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."*
- (1) A lot of fathers would not have reacted like this father!
- (2) *"Oh, I'll take him back alright, but he had better get on his hands and knees and beg me to forgive him after what he's done to me!"*
- (3) Neither did the father require a probationary period!
- E. This parable presents such a beautiful and accurate picture of God's willingness to receive us when we choose to return to Him (Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; **Heb. 4:15-16:** *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*).
- F. We all sin and fall short (Rom. 3:23); we know this disappoints, angers and grieves God, but the parable clearly shows the love, compassion and mercy God desperately desires to show us if we will return to Him (**Psa. 103:8-18;** 1 Jn. 1:8-9; Acts 8:22).

**Another important principle this parable teaches us is...**

**3. 7 God restores the penitent:**

- A. The son came to himself and realized what he had left (**vv. 17-19:** *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"*).
- (1) In his mind, he had so offended his father that he had no hope of getting back what he once had.
- (2) Instead, he planned to humbly request a position as a hired servant.
- "The father waited for his son's return because he loved him. He never lost hope or gave up on his son. Apparently, he was incessantly and continuously watching for him to come home. He wanted his son to be home and to restore the broken relationship. To the father, the fact of the son's coming home meant that he was penitent before he ever spoke a word." (Caldwell, p. 845)*

B. But, to his surprise, he never got the chance to make the request.

(1) As soon as he confessed his sin, his father interrupted him and welcomed him back as a son (**vv. 21-24**: “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.”).

(2) When God forgives us, He restores us to full fellowship! Comment on v. 22

**Jer. 31:34**: “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

**Psa. 103:12**: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

(3) However, this restoration of fellowship is dependent upon our willingness to repent, confess our sins, and seek God’s forgiveness.

**Ezek. 18:30-32**: “‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore turn and live!’

**Mic. 7:18-19**: “Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. 19 He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

**Acts 8:22**: “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”

**1 Jn. 1:7, 9**: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ... 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

### **Another important principle this parable teaches us is...**

#### **4. 8 God provides for those in His house:**

A. At least in part, it was the memory of his father’s goodness and kindness towards even his hired servants that moved the prodigal to repent:

(1) The prodigal trusted in his father’s willingness to provide for his servants: **v. 17**: “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!’”; **Rom. 2:4**: “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

(2) The father also provided for the older son: **v. 32**: “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.’”

B. God’s goodness and kindness are seen in the way He provides for His creation:

**Psa. 145:15-16**: “The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. 16 You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”; **Matt. 6:25-33**

**Acts 17:24-25**: “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”).

- C. However, God has a *special interest* and *care* for those who are “within His house”—His covenant people:
- Psa. 37:25:** “I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.”
- Phil. 4:19:** “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”
- D. The prodigal learned there is no mercy or compassion found in this world.
- (1) I’m sure when he first went to that “*far country*” he had many friends who enjoyed having a good time at his expense.
  - (2) “Another round of drinks for everyone!”
  - (3) We sometimes refer to such friends as “fair weather” friends; they’ll be right there with you as long as the money and fun don’t run out.
  - (4) But, when the money and fun ran out; where were the prodigal’s friends?
  - (5) Young people: Don’t make the mistake of thinking your worldly, non-Christian friends are your true friends.
  - (6) They are not! They will only be your “friend” when you follow their worldly ways.
  - (7) If you strive to follow God, they’ll turn on you in a second! **I Pet. 4:4:** “they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.”
- E. God has promised to lovingly and abundantly care for us, but we must remain in His house (in fellowship with Him; Matt. 6:25-33).

**Another important principle this parable teaches us is...**

**5. 9 God is patient with those in His house:**

- A. We know God is patient with sinners (**I Pet. 3:20:** “who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.”; cf. Gen. 6:3; 2 Pet. 3:9).
- B. However, this parable shows God is extremely patient with His children as the father in the story exercised patience for *both* sons (vv. 25-32).
- (1) We’ve already seen the father patiently and hopefully waited for the prodigal to return.
  - (2) Then the older brother is introduced into the story as refusing to join his father in accepting his younger brother back home (**v. 28:** “But he was angry and would not go in.”).
  - (3) The father goes out to the older son to reason with him (**v. 28:** “Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.”).
  - (4) We are not told how the older brother responded, but we do see God’s patience towards his son.
- C. We do not always act in accordance with God’s will (Rom. 7:15).
- (1) He reasons with us through His word (**Isa. 55:3:** “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”).
  - (2) He allows us the opportunity to grow, to overcome our challenges and to make the needed changes in our hearts and lives.
  - (3) God is extremely patient with us.

**Psa. 86:15:** *“But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.”*

**Joel 2:13:** *“So rend yo00 ur heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.”*

**Mic. 7:18:** *“Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.”*

### III. CONCLUSION: 10

1. There are many other lessons that can be learned from this parable, but it does give us a clear and beautiful picture of God’s role as our Father when we are at our worst.
2. We serve a great and merciful God (**Psa. 145:8:** *“The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.”*).
3. Despite the fullness of God’s mercy and love; He will judge the world (2 Cor. 5:10).
  - A. Those that obey His will, will be awarded eternal life in His very presence (**Rev. 21:3-4:** *“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’”*).
  - B. Those that have not obeyed will be forever lost! **2 Thess. 1:7-10:** *“...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,”*
4. You have it within your power to cause rejoicing in heaven! **Lk. 15:7:** *“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”*

Adapted from an article (*The Father of the Prodigal*) by Heath Rogers.

### REFERENCES:

Caldwell, C. G. 2011. Truth Commentaries: The Gospel According to Luke. Mike Willis, ed. Guardian of Truth Foundation. Bowling Green, KY.