

THE PRODIGAL FATHER

This week we learned about the baptism of Faith and Luke. It reminds you what this life is all about: finding God and being found by Him. We've all gone astray, Paul wrote, and created distance between us and the Lord. The great news is He wants to close the gap. So, He sent Jesus to reconcile those who have gone their own way. Brethren, it's never too late to turn back home. Sometimes we see those who never really knew Him come into His kingdom. Sometimes we've been in the kingdom, in the family of God, and we have walked away. No matter the situation - there's always time to come home. No matter what, we should rejoice at the grace of God among the nations.

Background to the text:

- Tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees and scribes are the audience.
- Jesus is criticized for eating with the tax collectors and sinners.
- The next three parables all connect. They center around rejoicing with those who repent (i.e., sinners and tax collectors). However, instead of rejoicing with Jesus, they ridicule Him and ignore the change in other's lives.
- The first picture is that of a shepherd who loses one of his sheep. He goes in search of it, and upon finding the sheep, throws it on his shoulders and brings it back home. He calls his friends and neighbors together, asking them to rejoice with him. So it is in heaven, Jesus says, over one sinner who repents. There's joy in heaven when this occurs.
- The second picture is that of a woman who loses a silver coin. She diligently seeks for it in her home, and upon finding it, calls her friends and neighbors, asking them to rejoice with her. So it is in heaven. Now we come to the third parable.

The Lost Son:

- 11-16: Leaving Home/Getting Lost

- The two sons, as we'll see by the full context, represent the two groups before Jesus. The younger son (sinners and tax collectors) and the older son (the Pharisees and scribes). Though the father in this parable seems to be separated from God (heaven - **vs.18**), it's very hard to not see the father as God. It's clearly representing the mercy, grace, and love of God.
- You'll remember how the oldest son was to be given a double portion of inheritance under the Law (**Deuteronomy 21:17**). Their inheritance was typically still under the Father's control until death. It was not normal to ask for your inheritance early. Even though the funds were divided among the sons, we see from **vs.30** that the older son's inheritance seems to be under the father's control. We don't want to think too much of this - it's a parable. We don't want to get too much into the weeds on this. It's not meant to be picked apart.
- The son gathered (apparently it can mean to liquidate, i.e. turned into cash/money) his possessions and took off. Unfortunately, he wasted it all and took part in reckless living. In **vs.30**, the older brother accuses him of spending it all on prostitutes. Was this correct? Well, they're not real characters, so maybe we shouldn't think too much about it.
 - This is why the son wants to leave. He can do his own thing. He doesn't have to worry about being hindered or judged by his father or family. Just as he said, "Give me the share of property that is coming to me." That's his problem . . . he had a "**give me**"

attitude. So it is with every lost son or daughter of God. However, we end regretting what we ask for, don't we?

- Well, you reap what you sow. On top of that . . . life happens. He's without money and food. He went from riches to rags and now he's in need. He hires himself out to a Gentile. He's not a slave (which had greater responsibility), but a lowly hired servant. He's not herding sheep, but rather feeding pigs. Remember how Peter told Cornelius how "unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation"? ([Acts 10:28](#)). Here he is, under the mercy of a Gentile tending to unclean animals. How humiliating.

- **17-24: Hitting Rock Bottom/The Return**

- What do you do when you hit rock bottom? Play the victim (shifting blame)? Woe is me (anxiety or depression). Pretend it's not happening (denial)? I need the Lord (dependence)?
- "He came to himself". A Hebrew idiom meaning to repent. It means to change one's mind. Of course, it's more than a thought. It results in action ([2 Corinthians 7:10](#)).
- This is powerful, because not only does it speak to the heart of the younger son, but it says volumes about the Father's character. The son knew he could return to the father. In that time and culture, to do such a thing was an absolute insult and disgrace. You could not return home. If you did . . . be ready for public shaming from your family.
- Something beautiful has happened in this young man's heart. He went from "**give me**" to "**make/treat me**". Now he gets it.
- The text doesn't say it, but it leaves us with the impression that the father had been waiting, watching and hoping. What does he do? He runs to his son. Not very becoming of a wealthy father. But, that's what he did. He had compassion, he ran, he embraced him (fell on his neck) and kissed him.
- Have you noticed something about the young man's prepared speech? It seems as though the father interrupts him and he doesn't finish. Instead of making him as one of his servants, he gifts him a robe (such robes were given to notable guests), a ring (sign of authority) and sandals (not something hired hands would have). He's killing a calf (they didn't eat meat with all meals - this was a special occasion). Why? Because the son was lost/dead, but now he's found/alive. It was time to celebrate with family and friends.
- Now who's the prodigal? The father has shown extravagant love to his son, has he not?

The Oblivious Son:

- **Vs. 25-32: Celebration/Rejoicing**

- This is sad. Instead of rejoicing at the well being of his lost brother, he became angry and started throwing a low attended, one man pouty-party outside.
- Leave it to this father to lovingly go out to the son and plead with him. You have to love the father, don't you? Before you say he's being too soft, you've got to ask the question: have I ever behaved in such a manner?
- Never disobeyed/neglected a command? Do you believe that?
- Not "my brother", but "this son of yours".
- How did he know he spent the money on prostitutes? Are we supposed to pick up on that and conclude that he's making things up, or was it Jesus' way of showing the darkness the younger brother found himself in?

- Bottom line, the son is saying: "Let me get this right. He shames us all and you reward him?" That doesn't seem just, does it? But the question is: how do we want God to deal with us? According to our deeds?
- Someone once said, "The older brother was outside staking his claim while the younger brother was inside claiming his steak!" I'd rather be claiming my steak . . . wouldn't you?
- This parable relates to what was happening with Jesus. It's a real time parable. Is Jesus saying that God is accepting these ungrateful leaders in such a state? Listen, I'm not sure, but I want to be careful. The point is clear: God recognizes that they've followed Him in many ways, but there's still a heart problem.
- What will the Pharisees and Scribes do? Will they have a change of heart or will they continue in their self-righteousness?
- We all have to be careful. Some sins are clear to see. Some people simply don't hide what's going on. Whereas others seem to be holy, but their ways are more secretive. The one's who are more secretive seem to think higher of themselves, but ask yourself: Would you rather deal with a "prodigal" or a hypocrite? Which are you more patient with? Some also return just to get a reward, but not because they've hurt the father. Let's beware of such a return.
- At the end of the day, we've all fallen short and need the grace of God. We need His mercy and love . . . and He's willing and wanting to give it to His children. The issue is not on God's end and it never has been. So, what will we do?