

Parable of the Lost Son

Scripture: Luke 15:11 – 32

Message for June 7th, 2020

For the month of June my messages will be dealing with some of the parables Jesus used. Let us start out by focusing on the Parable of Prodigal Son and let's look at Luke 15:11 – 14 first. This is one of my favorite parables that Jesus taught.

To hear a parable and understand it, the parable puts two stories side by side and suggests that the one helps us understand the other.

Here in this parable, Jesus gives us an unforgettable parent and child analogy for reconciliation. Woven within the father/sons relationship are the great biblical themes of sin, humility, faith, repentance, grace, forgiveness, restoration, and celebration. This parable goes to the depths of a parent's love for a child. This parable signals the profound nature of Jesus' love for the lost and found.

What father would not rejoice in a runaway son's return? What mother would not die for her child? So it is with Jesus and us!

The cultural background of this parable is this – the younger son's request for his inheritance is an insult to the father and family. The distribution of an estate and inheritance would take place when the owner died, not before. So when the younger son's request of his father – 'As far as I am concerned, you might as well be dead!' This request brings shame to the family and it broke his father's heart. But surprisingly the father grants his request and the younger son leaves to bear the consequences of his request.

Another story - A teenager had deeply disappointed his dad once when he was caught with a group of friends vandalizing

someone's property. When the father picked up the boy at the police station, his face was full of disappointment as the father said to his son – 'We do not do that sort of thing!' The 'WE' the father meant as their family. The boy had insulted him and shamed the family and broken his heart.

Rebellious sin is never just a breaking of the law, but it is a breaking of the divine heart. Rebellious sin is an insult to Jesus who is the One who loved us so much that He gave his life for us.

The younger son was impulsive and naive in his request. He was young and often the young make rash decisions. Also the young feel that they are young and strong and that they are not in need of anyone's help.

When you were young – how many mistakes did you make?

A lack of impulse control is not the exclusive challenge of young people. Mature men and women make bad choices without sensing the consequences. We get reckless with our moral decisions and we lose control of our impulses.

Sin is like this! Sin lives without boundaries and relationships. Sin is much more than neurological. Sin is prodigal in its reckless waste of grace.

Everybody seems to be recovering from something. Most of us would agree that before you can recover, you may have to hit rock bottom first. And at the bottom, we often discover what we could not see on the way down – a better way to live!

In the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son is almost starving and he has hit rock bottom because he comes to feel

that the pigs are better off than him. He is eating the scraps of the pigs – now that is rock bottom!

Jesus puts it this way – There with the pigs, the younger son came to himself. Have you ever felt like this when you have come to yourself?

At the bottom, the younger son's thoughts turn to his father's servants. He remembers how much that had to eat. He is in survival mode. So he decides to go home and confess how he has sinned against God and his father. He hopes that his father will take him back as a servant. His plan is to ask his father for help as one of his servants. He thinks survival as a servant of his father will be good enough. He wants to just live!

In repentance, we must ask much of God. In recovery, we must ask much of God, but not nearly as much as God is willing to give!

Now let us focus on Luke 15:15 – 23. This is where the younger son decides to go home. The motivation of the runaway son's walk home was something far deeper than his own good sense. He traveled home to his father because he trusted something in his father. In his years of growing up with dad, he knew dad was a good man full of wisdom and grace. He knew his childhood years were not wasted or forgotten.

On his walk home, the young son had plenty of time to second guess his plan to go home. On his long walk home, the younger son had plenty of opportunities to stop, but he keep walking home. WHY? His father was approachable!

How many times has a disobedient child said these words – 'If my parents ever hear what I did, they would kill me!' Oh, I

can remember uttering those words many times. I can remember uttering those words after I took a candy bar without paying for it. I can remember uttering those words when I threw a ball through the attic window. I can remember uttering those words too many times in my life.

But the difference here is that his parent's knew what he had done. His parent's knew what has happened to him. But like a magnet, the parent's goodness drew him home.

Our God is approachable! Even when we sin the worst sins, our God is approachable. No sinner is so bad that God cannot be trusted to receive him home.

What does it take for us to believe that? Does God have to put His one and only Son on a cross in our place for our sins? That is exactly what God did! God let Christ's cross be the magnet that draws us home. Our God is approachable!

When the son draws near his father's home, the father runs to meet his son. The father runs to meet his son before the son reaches the village. I can picture dad dropping everything and running to his lost son.

The father's spontaneous run means the father is willing to bear witness to his willingness to be publicly humiliated. Older men did not run in public lest they appear to be out of control. The father probably had to lift up his robe to run; the father probably had to bear his ankles which are an act beneath his dignity.

Or maybe the father was running to meet his son so that he would protect him from the villagers. The villagers had a right to

punish the son for insulting his father and losing his wealth to foreigners.

What stands out the most to me is the father runs to his son to show everyone his willingness to make the first move. The father is willing to exert himself in love even if it meant humiliation.

Humiliation is something Jesus knew. Jesus was insulted. Jesus was shamed. Jesus gave up his dignity upon the cross for us. Jesus willingly bared his body on the cross that we might come home in repentance again and again.

We can see in this parable extravagant love. Here in the father's welcome we see extravagance at its highest level. The father gives his returning son not just an embrace but he gives him a robe, a ring, and sandals. Together these gifts mark the son as a true son, not a servant. Servants wore neither robes nor sandals. And the ring was likely a signet ring which restored the son's authority in the village and home.

Then there was the fatted calf. Meat like that was only eaten on special occasions. The killing of the fatted calf meant that the whole village was invited to the celebration. You would have to say the father pulled out all the stops for his returning son. Nothing was too good or too much for his returning son. The one who was dead is now alive!

We have come under the extravagant reign of God's grace in Jesus Christ. We, the brothers & sisters in Christ, have heard of God's extravagant love in the emptiness of the tomb. There is no holding back here! Our relationship with God and with each other is likened to a banquet and a feast. This banquet and feast is extravagant beyond anything we deserve or can ever imagine

Let us pray:

Lord, our story is one of your grace. Forgive the insult of our sins. We know our sins are sharp and hurtful to you and others. Let us control the impulse in us to waste your grace by sinning.

And, O God, if we hit rock bottom in our lives, let us turn heavenward to your amazing grace.

Approachable God, no matter the gravity of our sins, draw us home by the cross of your holy Son. Merciful God, no matter how much we sin, let us seek your forgiveness.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your humiliation upon the cross on our behalf. We thank you for your extravagant love for us. Reveal this love through our actions, words, and deeds.

AMEN.