

Luke

Luke 15:11-32: Our Prodigal God

I. Introduction:

- A. Luke 15 can be thought of as the epicenter of Luke's Gospel because here, in these three parables, Luke's theme of God's love and mercy for sinners, and his call for repentance and conversion are brought to the forefront with full power!
 - 1. In this chapter Jesus gives us a series of three parables.
 - 2. Each of the three parables have the same theme and make the same basic point!
- B. The fact that Jesus tells three consecutive parables with the same essential meaning tells us that, in the Lord's mind, these teachings are crucial!
- C. Today's parable could be called by several titles.
 - 1. The most famous title is, of course, The Parable of the Prodigal Son.
 - a) This parable is probably one of if not the most famous story in the Bible.
 - b) Most people in this room, and many unchurched, could tell us this story.
 - 2. Another possible title would be The Lost Son, the Parable of the Two Lost Sons, or even, the Parable of the Prodigal Father.
 - 3. I have titled the message, Our Prodigal God.
 - 4. To understand why I would do that, we have to know the meaning of the word "prodigal." For years, based on context, I thought it meant wayward, or someone who has fallen into sin. On Wednesday, one of our students defined it similarly: someone who wanders far from home and returns (does mean this when it is a noun).
 - 5. Meaning of the word prodigal: 1) spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant; 2) having or giving something on a lavish scale.
 - 6. Our God is definitely a prodigal God in that he lavishes mercy and grace upon his children!
- D. Today: Our Father loves to receive and save sinners!

II. **Luke 15:11-16**—*And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*

- A. Of the three parables, this one is by far the most personal. It is a story we can relate to, because it is about a family. *There was a man who had two sons.*

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1. The younger of the two sons was not happy at home. The life of farming that he had always known chafed him.
 2. We can safely assume that he didn't like being the youngest son; being the low man on the totem pole and taking orders all the time galled him.
 3. He probably figured that he was only going to be young once, and he wanted to live his life right now just the way he wanted to live it.
- B. So, he came to his father with, to put it mildly, an unorthodox request. *Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.*
1. The younger son was wickedly arrogant. He assumed he that he knew better than anyone how to live and that he didn't need anyone to run his life.
 2. He showed profound ingratitude toward the father who had raised him. This ingratitude manifested in two ways:
 - a) He took $\frac{1}{3}$ of his father's wealth.
 - b) He abandoned his own duties to care for his father in his old age.
 3. All of this was followed by prodigal spending. He wasted his portion of the inheritance on wasteful luxury and debauched extravagance.
- C. What do we gather from this? He didn't love his father; in fact he regarded his him with complete contempt. He wanted his dad's money but wanted nothing to do with his father.
- D. From the comfort of this room, it is an easy matter to judge him harshly.
1. Yet what we ought to see, what must see, is ourselves. The young man was simply following the desires of his heart. He was doing what comes natural to us.
 2. The rebellious son is intended to be a portrait of us. The only question we must grapple with right now, whether we will hear the words of Christ with the ears of the unrepentant Pharisees or with the ears of the penitent tax-collectors.
- E. The story of the wayward son is the story of Adam in the Garden of Eden.
1. God had lovingly given Adam everything he could possibly need to be healthy and happy. He had given him beauty to enjoy, and food to strengthen.
 2. Yet Adam was not satisfied. He wanted to be like God; that is to say he wanted to be his own man, to make his own decisions, to live his life the way he wanted to live it.
 3. So he disobeyed, he turned his back on his Heavenly Father and lived his own life. Every person since the fall, has made the same choice.
 4. This is not the story of the prodigal son. It is the story of me, and you.
- F. V. 14-16— *And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*

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1. After spending his wealth, disaster struck. There was a famine in the country where he lived. The proud young son now hit rock bottom.
2. It is easy to imagine that just a few months prior to this he probably had many “friends” who were all too happy to drink his wine and eat at his table.
3. Now, he has no one. He sank to the utter depths of humiliation for a Jewish man.
 - a) He hired himself out to a foreigner.
 - b) He was sent to the field to feed the pigs.
 - c) He had crashed and burned so spectacularly that he would have been all too happy to eat the food of the swine. No one gave him anything.
4. He is now at rock bottom. What will he do?

III. **Luke 15:17-24**—*“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father; and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.*

- A. V. 17—*But when he came to himself.* With this short phrase, the story turns. And it is precisely here that we see the wisdom of the father.
1. We didn’t talk about the dad in the first block of Scripture. Some say that the father foolishly gave the younger of his two sons his portion of the inheritance.
 2. The line of thought goes that if the father had not given him the money, he could not have left home and squandered it. That line of reasoning fails to reckon with the sons true problem.
 3. You see this son was lost before he ever left home. He was wayward before he was ever prodigal. His heart was hard and sinful. He was confident in his own pride. The father understood this, and the father understood that there was something more precious than all of his wealth at stake here: the soul of his youngest son.
- B. With the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin, we were taught that it is God who seeks us when we are lost. The parable of the lost coin doubled down on this, emphasizing our utter helplessness in finding ourselves.

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1. But where is the searching shepherd in this parable? Where is the woman sweeping the floors for her lost coin here?
 2. The parable of the prodigal son teaches us HOW God searches us out. The one who chooses the elect before the foundation of the world knows how to find us and bring us into the family.
 3. Not every child of God has to experience what this lost son experienced but some do.
 4. Nevertheless some of the elect cannot be born again until they are utterly humbled the way this son in the parable was humbled.
- C. William Perkins was born in 1558. He is known as the “father of Puritanism.”
1. He wasn’t always a lover of God. When he was a student at the University of Cambridge, he was living a notoriously wicked life as a drunkard and a blasphemer.
 2. One day, by God’s providence, Perkins overheard a woman in the street scolding her naughty son by saying something to the effect, “If you keep living this way, you’re going to turnout like that William Perkins!”
 3. This public humiliation deeply affected Perkins and led to his transformation and devotion to a pious life. He only lived to be 44 years old, but he devoted himself to the study of God and wrote the over 6500 pages you see here.
 4. William Perkins understood the way in which our Father works in the hearts of his children; he understood it from personal experience.
- He wrote:
- a) Q: But how mayest thou be made partaker of Christ and his benefits?
A: A man of a contrite and humble spirit, by faith alone apprehending and applying Christ with all his merits unto himself, is justified before God and sanctified....
 - b) Q: How doth God bring men truly to believe in Christ?
A: First, he prepareth their hearts, that they might be capable of faith, and then he worketh faith in them.
 - c) Q: How doth God prepare men’s hearts?
A: By bruising them, as if one would break a hard stone to powder; and this is done by humbling them (Ezekiel 11:19; Hosea 6:1–2).
 - d) Q. How doth God humble a man?
A. By working in him a sight of his sins, and a sorrow for them.
5. R. C. Sproul, “You can know that you’re a sinner without being born again, but you can’t be born again without knowing that you’re a sinner.”
- D. This is what happened for the young man in our parable. *I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no*

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longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ 20 And he arose and came to his father.

1. This young man had left home searching for freedom and had brought himself one step away from literal slavery.
 2. He left home proud and sure that he knew how to live.
 3. Now, by God’s grace, he had come to embody the opening words of the Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:20-21, *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*
 4. Yet, as this parable teaches, feelings of regret are not sufficient; feelings of longing for God are not enough. We must *arise and go!*
 5. He purposed in his heart to go to his father, confess his sin and unworthiness to be called son, and ask to be a hired servant. *And he arose and came to his father.*
 6. He had left a wealthy prince; he had come home a beggar.
- E. What this son did not know, could not have known, was that his father had yearned for him to come home every day since he left.
1. He had often looked down the dusty road, eyes searching for his boy.
 2. And on this day, he saw someone coming. The figure was still a long way off, but the old man could tell from the way he walked that it was his son.
- F. V. 20-24—*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.*
1. The scene we have just read is inexpressibly beautiful. The father saw his lost son coming home; filled with compassion, he ran to him, embraced him and kissed him.
 - a) For an elderly man to run was unthinkable. The father cared not a bit for his dignity, but lifted his robes and ran to meet his son.
 2. The son began to speak the piece that he had rehearsed. *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*
 - a) The prodigal father didn’t even let him finish. So ready was he to forgive his son, so ready was he to receive him back into his home that he interrupted him, *Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.*

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- b) The best robe: It would have been a long stately robe that reached to the feet; it was the kind worn by a prince or a king.
- c) The ring: It was a symbol of sonship. The prodigal father was unwilling to take him on as a hired servant. He received him into full sonship.
- d) Sandals: The father's slaves went barefoot. His son would not!
- 3. This poor father had every right to teach him a lesson. He would not have been in the wrong to require the son to prove himself! But no; he yearned to pour out grace, mercy, and love on his son! Why?
- G. *For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.*
 - 1. Truly the tears of the repentant are the wine of angels! When a sinner repents there is a party in heaven, and it is real!
 - 2. Do you see the spiritual reality painted for us in this parable? Do you see our prodigal God displayed for us in all of his glorious grace and compassion?
 - 3. There is at least one thing that Satan does better than tempting us to sin. And that is to accuse us when we have sinned. He loves to whisper to our souls that we are beyond forgiveness. We can't be reconciled to God; we're too dirty, too filthy. No salvation for you is his cry. Do you dare think he'd receive you after what you have done? After what you have said?
 - a) Perhaps you have never repented of your sin and trusted in Christ alone for salvation. You are here today and you have heard the Gospel. And you are wondering, maybe daring to hope that there is a place for you in God's family.
 - b) It is my pleasure to tell you there is! Even now our prodigal Father looks down the road for your arrival! He waits to embrace you and lavishly pour out love and forgiveness upon you! Our Father loves to receive and save sinners!
 - c) Maybe you are a Christian. But perhaps you have wandered off into a far country and have been living in sin, public or secret, and you wonder, "Is there mercy for me?" Yes! There is! I tell you our Father will not cast you off! He will embrace you! He will restore you!

IV. **Luke 15:25-32**—*"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet*

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you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

A. While not as famous, this part of the parable is important.

1. Remember the context. Jesus began teaching these parables because the *Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*
2. Like the scribes and Pharisees, this older brother didn’t rejoice.

B. He knew nothing of mercy and forgiveness. He was angry, and as Kent Hughes notes, “The word used here carries the idea of swelling, settled anger that rises like sap in a tree on a hot day.”

1. The older brother was righteous in his own eyes. Listen to his words, *‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’*
2. The son’s focus was on his outward acts of obedience. He had served. He had obeyed. And he had never been recognized for it.
3. And look at v. 30, note how he refers to his brother: *This son of yours.*

C. The older brother was not prodigal, but he was just as lost as his younger brother. The most profound tragedy in this story is that the older brother was totally unaware of this.

1. His heart was not in sync with his father’s.
2. In his heart he was in a far away country, living in his own sin of unrepentant pride.
3. But the father, always loving and always generous toward his sons *said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”*
4. His father had already left the party and come outside to entreat him to join the celebration. And even after hearing his firstborn’s words he reasoned with him.
5. And in reasoning with him, the invitation to repent still hangs in the air.

D. And that is where the story ends. We don’t know what the older brother did. We are left to answer the question, what will we do?

1. And we must heed the warning of the story given in the attitude of the older brother.
2. We are always prone to naturally drift toward self-righteousness. We forget where we came from; we forget the pig sty of our sin where the Lord found and rescued us.

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3. Our love can grow cold, and all too easily we can become indifferent to the lost around us. We neglect praying for them; we do not speak of Christ to them; we no longer invite others to church; and we do not share the gospel with them.
4. We can become like this older brother, the lawyers, and the Pharisees.
5. Worse yet, if we do not walk with the Lord and allow him to daily renew our minds, we can begin to think that some people are beyond forgiving, beyond receiving.
6. May the Lord spare us from ever having such wicked attitudes toward the lost.

V. Vital Questions:

- A. Do I want to be reconciled to God?
- B. What is the spiritual reality painted for us in this parable?
 1. How should I live knowing that God is lavishly generous in grace and compassion?
 2. In what ways does that make me want to live differently for him?

VI. Application: Questions for Reflection:

- A. Do I want to be reconciled to God?
 1. Am I willing to repent of my sin and trust in Christ alone for salvation?
 2. Have I been living in a far country, a stranger to my Savior? Am I willing to come home to my Heavenly Father?
 3. What would the Lord have me do in response to this parable?
- B. Am I in a “far country” because of my passions like the younger brother, or because of my attitudes like the older brother?
 1. In what ways am I like the younger brother?
 2. In what ways am I like the older brother?
 3. In what ways do I need to repent?
- C. What is the spiritual reality painted for us in this parable?
 1. How should I live knowing that God is lavishly generous in grace and compassion?
 2. In what ways does that make me want to live differently for him?