

The Prodigal
Luke 14:25-15:2, 15:11-32

25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,
26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.
27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.
28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?
29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,
30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.
31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?
32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.
33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.
34 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?
35 It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 15

1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.
2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

Luke 15:11-32

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:
12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.
13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.
14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.
15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.
17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.
20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

- 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
- 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:
- 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, 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.
- 25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.
- 26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.
- 27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.
- 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.
- 29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:
- 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.
- 31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.
- 32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. KJV

Introduction:

This is a story that I have been hearing ever since I was a little child. I remember that my father had a message from this passage that I heard a number of times. I think the title was “The Two Prodigals” and he pointed out in it that both brothers had a problem with sin but only one of them is said to have come to repentance.

But in all of the sermons I have heard I do not remember one of them pointing out the backdrop to the story. Jesus had been preaching to a large multitude and He had been speaking to them of the high cost of following Him and living for God, the fact that faith in Him meant giving up one’s life to live consistently with God’s Word.

Luke 14:33

- 33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. KJV

The publicans and sinners in the multitude seemed to press forward in the crowd, fascinated and interested in what Jesus was saying. It may have even been that some of them publicly confessed Christ and made it known that they were trusting and believing Him.

There was another group in the multitude that was incensed that Jesus would even consider having such people close to Him, much less confessing Him and being received as genuine saints. So, they complained.

Luke 15:2

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. KJV

So, Jesus told three stories about things being lost and then found again, each time pointing out the rejoicing that surrounded the restoration of something valuable that had been lost. He told the story of the one sheep in a herd of 100, of one coin of ten and then of one brother in a family which had two sons.

But He also developed the story of the brothers much more fully than the other two and He used an actual event rather than a supposed one. “A certain man had two sons,” He said, and He would not have specified that event that way if it was only a parable based on an imaginary even.

This is the reason we know that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is also a true story. If you will recall, Jesus told it in the same sort of way. In fact, we find it in the very next chapter of Luke’s gospel.

Luke 16:19-20

19 **There was a certain rich man**, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 **And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus**, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, KJV

“There was a certain rich man,” and “there was a certain beggar,” He said, even naming the beggar. We should forever dismiss from our minds the notion that Jesus made up stories to illustrate His points. He is God! He knows all of the stories of all of the people who have ever lived. All He needed do was choose the stories of people that most closely matched the truth that He was communicating.

This was a real story about a real family and two very real sons.

One of the things that we should learn to do as we read scripture is to ask questions of the text and especially if we are actually dealing with people and theology.

Here we are dealing with a young man.

What kind of life did he have?

Was his father wealthy or poor?

Was the man raised in the faith or not?

What kind of a man was his father?

Is he presented in such a way as we would think him committed to the Law of God in a real way?

Why is his mother not mentioned?

What kind of a person was his brother, and what would life have been like with

this guy as his older brother?

I think we can reasonable assume that this one whom we only know as “the Prodigal” was raised by a godly landowner who had been very successful and was very wealthy. His mother simply may have been omitted from the story or she may have died early and left the landowner to raise these two boys on his own. What little we know of the two boys their behavior seems consistent with that of boys raised by a single father. The younger seemed absent the qualities of being able to respect his father and appreciate what he had, while the older seem absent the qualities of love, gentleness and forgiveness. A godly mother would probably have been able to help them with that.

But the younger son did not like nor enjoy his life at home. This strict moral life of the Jew was too much for him as was the jealous and domineering spirit of his older brother. He desired a different life and he desired it so much that he was willing to do one of the most selfish things a child can ever do to a parent. He asked for his inheritance before the death of his father.

There is a principle here that a godly child sees and a selfish one does not. The property of the parent belongs to the parent so long as he/she is alive. The child has no right to it and the reality is that the parent might need whatever he/she has saved in their last years. The child only has right to the property after the parent has died and then only as the parent wished if those wishes were recorded and documented. How many stories have we heard of children who have bled their parents dry and then when the parent is too old to provide for themselves, the child is nowhere to be found and has squandered whatever he was given?

His father in kindness divided out the inheritance of both boys and distributed it to them.

Luke 15:12 ...he divided unto **them** his living KJV

Again, we should ask some questions.

Does it seem the boys received a large sum of money?

Were there any restrictions on them as to what they did with it?

What does this say about the disposition of the father?

How quickly did the younger man leave?

What does this say about his perception of life at home?

Where did he go?

What does that say about his perspective?

It does seem that the inheritance divided to the two men was very large and they were gifted very generously by their father. No restrictions of any kind that we can observed were placed on the two as to what they could do with their money. This speaks of a father is kind, “too kind,” some might say but I would have you remember that the father is serving as a sort of an image or representation of God in the story. It was the complaint of the Pharisees that Jesus was being “too kind” if you recall.

The youngest son left as soon as he could get packed and traveled to a “far country” which tells us all we need to know about what he thought of this life under the roof of his father. He could not get away fast enough or far enough. There were, no doubt, sinners standing in the multitude that very day who were nodding their heads, remembering a time in their life when they had

abandoned home and all that went with it, departing from godly parents to live an ungodly life.

One of the reasons that this is one of the most famous stories of scripture is that there are so many adults who can identify with the younger son of this ancient Jewish family.

Let us consider now his life in the ‘far country.’

What was his life like there?

How long did this lifestyle go on? A week? A month? A year? Years?

Was it ‘fun’?

Do you suspect that there was a group of folks he hung out with that he called ‘friends’?

His brother had somehow found out how his younger brother was living in this ‘far country.’

Luke 15:30

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. KJV

We might think that he simply guessed at what his brother was doing but Jesus related his affirmation in a pretty concrete way. Could it be that this brother had used some of *his* money to hire a spy to go and see what his brother was doing? But there was no effort to rescue him was there?

We can be sure that what Jesus related was true. The man was living an immoral life, no doubt consuming much alcohol and ‘enjoying’ whatever forms of wickedness this country had to offer. We must remember that this would also have been a pagan country which would have had all kinds of feasts and parties at the idol’s temple. No doubt younger brother was taking these in as well.

It seems that his father was wealthy so the portion divided to the brothers would have been sizable, enough to carry one on for some time. We are not told how long but I suspect well more than a year was wasted away until the money ran out. We can be sure that the ‘adventure’ was ‘fun’ for a while but the reality is that there is no satisfaction in anything the world has to offer. It would not be unreasonable to think that sometime before the money ran out the enjoyment had turned to disappointment.

But the money did run out and the life in the Far Country became miserable beyond endurance. Not only did his money run out but the circumstances of the Far Country changed. A might famine reduced all opportunities to the minimum and the best job the boy could find was one that fouled his Jewish senses thoroughly. Swine were unclean to the Jews and the only job which would prevent him from starving was a job feeding them. Not only that but a hunger took possession of him that made him long for the ‘slop’ that he was feeding the hogs.

It was here that a most remarkable thing occurred.

It is mentioned almost in passing but it is the most important thing in the story and for many the

single most important reality in their lives.

“He came to himself.” His entire consciousness underwent a sudden and complete renovation. That life at home under his father’s house which had been so loathsome to him that he was willing to insult his father, abandon his responsibilities on the family estate, and throw away every moral value he had ever known, suddenly ***that life*** became worth him risking everything to go back there.

It was an altered state of mind a reversal of all perspectives, a re-alignment of all values, and a complete humbling of himself. His pride and arrogance, his love of wickedness, his attraction for harlots, all vanished as it were in a moment.

Here again, how many of the sinners and publicans standing before Jesus were experiencing just this moment as Jesus was speaking? How many who had run away from home were just this moment formulating the purpose to run away from their running away?

But they faced the same obstacles, though in different details, with the Prodigal. The sinner who finds himself suddenly faced with the shipwreck that he has created and in a moment is granted by God the ability to see all of the colors in their proper hue also sees that he is a long way from where he needs to be and there is no magic carpet to ride home.

In fact, the way home is filled with difficulties at every turn. Every step he has taken away from God had to be walked back with confrontation and repentance of that sin. “No man gave to him,” and no denizen of the world is going to give any assistance to the repenting sinner. There are no short-cuts on the road home either. It is just as far back as it was to originally travel away only this time the Prodigal was weak, starving and running on shame and fear rather than excitement.

Listen to me, I am totally convinced that the only effective repentance is total repentance. There is one job in our whole life that we must really do well and that is the project that has been recommended to us with the warning of heaven from the first true preacher until today, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Would you have your Dr. do a half-way job on a heart bypass? How about a kidney stone removal? Cataract surgery? Appendix removal? Would you even want your Dentist to do a half-way job on a tooth filling?

Then why, in God’s Great Universe, would you ever even entertain the idea that a half-way repentance is acceptable to the Creator of all Things?

How does a starving man with no money in a far country get home?

As I was writing this I remembered a ‘Dad joke’ my father would tell to children. “What did the man say who rode a stick horse to New York? ‘I feel like I walked all the way.’”

He had to walk every step. He had to stop regularly a work for a while to finance the rest of the

trip. The man who stumbled through his father's gate was a ragged, worn, tired, miserable shadow of the boy who left on his way to conquer the world. ***But he was a repentant man and was about to have a reception he would not have envisioned.***

I want you to notice something else about the change of consciousness. It was permanent. That which he had determined to say to and ask of his father in the far country was exactly what he said and asked when he was standing in front of him.

Listen to me, ***repentance is a real work, not a figment of someone's imagination. The repenting sinner follows through on his repentance and he makes it a permanent work.*** This is not to say he does not fail but his mind, heart, and soul have been forever changed by the work of God and there is no reversing course.

Luke 15:18-19

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. KJV

Luke 15:21

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. KJV

I think Jesus intended to show us that the father cut his son off before he could finish. He would hear none of him being a servant.

There is a reward that is beyond all imagination to the one who truly repents. Sadly in our day this reward is offered to those who barely repent and to those who never repent. I am here to tell you that this is a false offer. There is no reward to the unrepentant soul regardless of how religious he might be, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

The Prodigal received a great blessing. In spite of his sin and foolishness. In spite of his disrespect of his father and his disdain for the spiritual truths his father had taught him, God granted him the grace of an altered state of consciousness.

God removed the rose colored glasses the devil had sold him and gave him proper eyesight,

God took away his love for sin and gave him a longing for righteousness.

God removed him from the hog pen and set a feast before him in his father's house.

And, I will tell you one more thing.

God walked every step of that long journey home with him. And even though it was rough and many of the jobs he had to take were difficult, he lived, he survived, he kept his commitment to God, to himself and to his father. And when he was finally home, God preserved his story to encourage publicans and sinners to come to Christ no matter what snide remarks the religious hurled at them.

If you will repent of your sins and trust with all your heart in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be received by God into a restored relationship with Him.

If you dally, if you play at repentance, if you listen to those who tell you that halfway measures are going to provide a full remedy, I have no hope for you. I have no promises of salvation and restoration for you.

And... if you are of that group like the older brother and the Pharisees whom he represents who have appointed yourself to examine others and criticize the liars, thieves, and harlots who make their way to Christ, your expectation should be the same as the false teachers spoken of by

Heb 10:26-31

- 26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,
27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.
28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:
29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?
30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.
31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. KJV