

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15

- It has been described as the priceless pearl of Jesus' parables
- Some say that it is his finest parable
- Charles Dickens refers to it as "the greatest story ever told"
- It has inspired artwork, music and poetry
- It is the entire gospel in a nutshell
- If you truly understand this story... The story of the father, the older brother, and the Prodigal Son, you will begin to grasp the central thrust of Jesus and the main emphasis of the New Testament
- Some Parables are easy to understand because Jesus tells us what they mean...
- The seed that fell on good ground is those who hear the word and receive it...
- Not only are some easier to understand, but the meaning is also clear...
- You don't want to be stony or thorny ground, you want to be good ground
- It's simple...

- The Parable of the Prodigal Son is not that simple
- All of us, at one point or another in our lives, have been the Prodigal Son
- But, we've also been the Older Brother
- And, we've also been the Father
- Jesus has a lesson for us in this wonderful Parable, no matter which character we find ourselves relating to at that moment in our life...
- Let's look at Luke 15 again this morning, and try to put ourselves in to this amazing story
- **Imagine being the Prodigal Son**
- A son who one day goes to a his father and asks him for your inheritance
- Now imagine seeing the blood drain from your father's face
- In the culture of Prodigal Son, to ask your father for inheritance, is to say that you are sick of your family, and you wish your father dead
- Your father is shocked, for *"There was no law or custom among my culture which entitles the son to a share while the father is still alive"*
- Like many forced sales born of sadness, the inheritance sale is quick and ugly
- The villagers refer to you as despicable and childish, but they nonetheless gouge your father on the price for his land
- Sale of land normally takes months, often years, but in Verse 13 we read that "not many days" later the inheritance sale was over and you were gathering your stuff and heading out
- You got what you wanted, and you head off into a distant land to spend your money
- Then came the famine
- There were 10 famines in the century in which you live
- No media to alert other countries that could help

- No Red Cross or World Vision to feed the hungry
- In times of famine, a person turns to their family
- But you have none
- You are a stranger in a strange land
- You become hungry
- You could return home
- Home, to shame before your father, to the shame of having to be fed by your older brother, to the shame of all those villagers who called you childish and despicable and hurled insults at you
- Instead you do the unthinkable
- *“Cursed are those who breed swine,”* says the Rabbi
- Cursed are you, as you sell yourself to a pig breeder
- It gets worse
- Pigs eat seed pods
- Hungry, you gaze at the pods, wishing you were a pig, wishing you could eat what they eat
- You, a Jew, wanting to live like a pig
- Then... You have an idea
- You could negotiate with your father
- You could ask to be a hired hand
- If you have to work for someone, it might as well be him
- Take you back... not as a son, not a slave, but a hired hand
- A hired hand does not live at home, does not join the family, but simply expects to be paid for a day’s work

- And so, hungry, selfish, dejected... but still independent, you return
- **Now imagine being the Father**
- Your son had wished you were dead
- In costly pain, you have given him his freedom and let him go
- For years you've waited
- Heart broken
- If he returns, you must get there first
- You watch and wait
- One day, while your son is a long way off, you see him
- You must reach him before he receives the scorn of the villagers
- And so you run
- Middle Eastern men don't run
- Middle Eastern men wear long robes that reach to the ground
- To run means hitching up your robe, exposing your legs
- To run will bring you humiliation and shame
- Yet you run
- In full view of the villagers
- You hug and kiss your son
- By rights your son should fall down before you and kiss your feet
- But this is love
- You hug and kiss your son

- Your son accepts your love and although once he was lost, now he has been found
- He tells you, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”*
- In the face of your love his prepared speech changes
- He gives up his plans, his big ideas
- He only has his awareness of his sin, and his sudden sadness at the breaking of relationship you once had
- You act
- This is not a time for punishment or teaching him a lesson, this is a time for a ceremony, for a feast, a ring and a party
- You kill the fatted calf
- A calf that will feed 200 guests
- You have found your son
- Now the whole village must meet your son
- Your break up was done in public
- Your reconciliation will be public as well
- You are not ashamed of your son
- Everyone must come to greet your son in your house, knowing your forgiveness
- **Now imagine you are the Older Brother**
- You have never disobeyed your Father
- You have been here working for him right from the start
- You remember your younger brother’s selfish request
- You are angry

- You saw your father endure costly pain and rejection
- You heard him crying at nights in his room
- You saw your father endure public humiliation
- You saw your brother sell the land
- The law was clear. *“If a man assigned his goods to his son to be his after his death... his son cannot sell them since they are in the fathers possession.”*
- Your Brother clearly broke the law
- Your Brother halved your family estate
- That land was your identity, your birthright
- Your Brother sold your identity, your birthright
- You know what he’s been doing with the money too
- Whores and Wine
- You know how much it bothers your Father
- You try to make him feel better by being stable and steady
- Every day you go out to work n the fields
- One day, you hear the music
- A party
- Puzzled, you draw near
- Rather than rush in, you stand aloof
- You ask for information
- A reconciliation celebration, you are told
- Your Father, your younger Brother and half the village, sharing the joy that comes from love and forgiveness

- You are angry
- Where is the justice in that?
- Where is the repentance from your little Brother?
- You are so mad that you insult your father
- You refuse to go in... You refuse to join the party
- And so you see your father humiliate himself again
- In front of his guests, he comes out to talk to you
- How low will your father go?
- What next?
- Will he also run around and also expose his legs?
- In anger, you speak, *"For all these years I have been working like a slave for you and I never disobeyed your commandments yet you never gave me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back who has devoured your living with prostitutes you killed the fatted calf for him."*
- And to your anger, your father replies, *"Beloved son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. To celebrate and rejoice was necessary for this your brother was dead and he has come to life, he was lost and has been found."*
- **And the parable ends**
- There is no resolution
- There is no reconciliation
- The musicians wait, the guests watch, the servants are poised with more food and wine
- What will happen next?
- Will the Older Son come in to the Party?

- What will the Older Son say?
- What would you say?
- What would **YOU** do next?
- I think **THAT** really is the lesson we are supposed to get out of this Parable
- There is no explanation of who represents what
- Many people place God in the role of the Father in this Parable
- If that is the case, then was Christ telling us that we should be childish, selfish, Prodigal children? Or jealous, self-righteous, unmerciful older brothers?
- Or, maybe something better...
- Maybe we are we supposed to be like God? Like the Father?
- I can easily see myself in all three roles...
- **First the youngest son, the Prodigal himself**
- Prodigal means to “spend money or resources freely and recklessly”
- Seeing how I'm reading this exhortation from a new iPad, I guess I qualify for that role easily enough
- The Prodigal Son wants his independence
- He wants to make his own decisions and do what he wanted to do and not to have to listen to his father and older brother tell him what is right and wrong
- The simple interpretation of the Prodigal Son is that we as human beings, take the inheritance that God has given to us... We take the money, the brains, the personality, the health, the resources; and we say, *“God, I don't want to have anything to do with you anymore. I am going to go and live my life as if you don't exist.”*
- Hopefully, we human beings eventually come to our senses
- We wake up and realize that we need to return home to our Heavenly Father

- We realize that things are better in our Father's house for even the lowest of servants than they are out in the world without Him
- The lesson we should get from the Prodigal Son is when you find yourself dining with Pigs, to get up, swallow your pride and walk back through that village full of whispering, finger pointing fools, and walk into the outstretched arms of your Heavenly Father
- He will forgive you, so it's okay to forgive yourself
- **I probably most closely associate with the Older Brother**
- The Older Brother is a perfect example of "***unattractive goodness***"
- Somehow I manage to convince myself that my dirt is cleaner than your dirt...
- I was a Virgin when I married
- I've never cheated on my wife
- I don't drink, I don't smoke, and I seldom swear
- Sure, I have lots of sins that I commit each day, but they aren't as bad as the ones that you do...
- It's so easy to be a good church going, worshipping, Bible studying, praying Christadelphian
- You can go to church, love Jesus, read the Bible, and feel that you are a little less sinful than people around you who don't do this as often as you do
- You can feel that those of us who are here today are a little more righteous and well behaved and well mannered than those who didn't come today
- The story of the Older Brother represents the unattractive goodness of so many self-righteous Brothers and Sisters who are blind to their own faults. ...
- I like the saying that goes, "*Lord, make the bad people good, and the good people a little more like-able.*"
- You wonder which of the two Brothers was more miserable...
- The one in the far country who slept in the gutter or the one who had stayed home and whose heart had become sour and loveless to people outside his inner circle of

family a few friends

- One Brother left the meeting, and one Brother never missed a Sunday...
- But, did his heart ever show up at the Memorial Service?
- Was he faithful and well dressed, but on the inside simply not a Christ-Like person at all?
- Did you ever wonder what would have happened if the Prodigal Son had met the Older Brother on the road home first, instead of his father?
- It bothers me how many of our Prodigals have stayed away from our congregations because of the very fear of encountering so-called good church-going people
- Sure, we can tell ourselves that this is not a good reason to abstain from the table of the Lord...
- But, does that make us any less responsible for our actions?
- The lesson we should get from the Older Brother is to fully accept the fact that sin is sin
- God hates our Gossiping, lying and unloving heart just as much as He hates adultery, drunkenness and murder
- Even though you've been working hard for many years at trying to be good, that doesn't give you any right to treat poorly a Brother or Sister who has fallen on tough times
- Let's open our hearts up to a wider circle than just those who we think are good, and open our arms to those around us
- To widen the circle of your compassion, you have to stand at the edge
- **Isn't that the lesson from the Father?**
- He never gave up on his Prodigal Son
- We should never give up on people either, no matter how bad a situation they have gotten themselves into
- I always love how he didn't wait until the son came home and properly apologized before he humbly accepted his apology

- He ran out there like a fool, grabbed him by the neck and cried his eyes out
- That's how I want to respond the next time someone comes to me to talk about something they've done that's hurt my feelings!
- Did you notice what the Father says to the Older Brother?
- He went out onto the porch to find his older son, and said, *"Son, I love you. Son, my inheritance is yours. Son, why don't you come inside and see your brother."*
- He loved BOTH of his sons!
- And so it is with God
- He loves those who sin by wandering away
- And He loves those who sin even though we stay right here in the Ecclesia
- And God wants us to be just like him!
- That's why he gave us His son
- That is the meaning and the purpose of the death that we have gathered to remember this day
- So that through the death of our Lord we would be changed and through the life of Christ we would live to serve him
- To be like the Prodigal Son and return
- To be like the Older Son and forgive
- And to be like the Father, who loved them both