

## Message #75

## Luke 15:11-20

Over the years I have known some amazing men who are skilled in restoring old cars. They bring cars into their shop that look all banged up, dented and dinged and wrecked and in a few weeks out comes something beautiful. What was originally looking like a wreck ends up being magnificent.

The word of God teaches the grace of God and the grace of God teaches this very principle; not concerning damaged cars, but concerning damaged sinful people. Those who often end up being the most dependable, loyal, beautiful and devoted servants of God are often those who have been banged up and mangled by sin.

When a sinner comes to Christ, he soon realizes how much he is loved and how much he has been forgiven. Repentant sinners are thankful for the privilege they have of having a relationship with God and they usually become the most dependable, loyal, loving, hardworking servants in God's work.

Now Pharisees would rather have God destroy sinners, not save them. They don't see themselves as being a sinner or in need of any cleansing or forgiveness, but they look at others and see them as those who should be judged.

This is one of the most famous passages in all of the N.T.. There have been books written about this text and there have been movies made about it. It has been called "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." As Richard Lenski, the Lutheran theologian and scholar of the early 1900's observed, this parable is the crown of all parables; it has no equal in all of literature.

Now the primary thesis or point of the parable is this:

**WHEN A STRAYING CHILD REPENTS OF HIS SIN, THOSE WHO ARE RIGHT WITH GOD REJOICE AND RESTORE; BUT THOSE PHARISEES WHO ARE NOT RIGHT WITH GOD BECOME JEALOUS AND ANGRY JUDGES.**

One of the major debates about Biblical scholars concerning this parable is whether or not the two brothers were both lost or both saved. Quite honestly, a good case may be made for either position and this parable may be expounded from each perspective.

Those who hold that both brothers are lost do so on the basis of the terms "lost" and "dead" which are found in chapter 15: 15:4, 6, 8, 9, 24, 32. These terms seem to suggest one is unsaved and since the context is designed to contrast Christlikeness with Phariseeism (15:1-2), Pharisees are not saved (14:24). Therefore, when the story starts both boys are lost.

According to this interpretation, the prodigal son would be the son who eventually becomes a believer and realizes the depravity of his sin, but the elder son never becomes a believer and never realizes the depravity of his sin; but he has confidence in his own self-righteousness.

Others, including myself, are of the opinion that this story is about two brothers who were both believers. One believer gets involved in gross sin and the other doesn't. The purpose of the parable is to show that Phariseeism is not something that is just a problem with the lost, but it is something that can dominate a believer.

The case for both of these boys being believers is based on seven observations:

- 1) Both are the father's sons (**15:11**).
- 2) Both have the status of being brothers (15:27, 32).
- 3) Both are entitled to an inheritance (**15:12**).
- 4) The rebellious son who gets into sin is not himself (**15:17**).
- 5) The father continually classifies both boys as his sons (15:24, 31).
- 6) The elder son was promised the father's wealth (15:31).
- 7) The specific context of this parable is aimed at disciples who are believers (16:1).

Jesus Christ tells this parable to establish that Christlikeness and Phariseeism can exist in the family of God and will become evident when a wandering sinner truly repents.

The parable may be broken down into five narrative parts. We will examine two of those parts today:

### **NARRATIVE PART #1 – One son falls into rebellion and sin. 15:11-16**

Here is a case study of how a son, who was raised in a good godly home, falls into sin and rebellion. There are six facts we may observe:

#### **Fact #1 - The son who fell into sin was part of a good family. 15:11**

This father had two sons. One of the sons takes a walk on the wild side and the other doesn't. What this tells us is that these two boys were brought up by the same father and brought up in the same environment.

This is one time you cannot blame mom or dad for the sin and rebellion. This son made a decision to turn his back on his own family and walk away into rebellion and sin.

In a previous ministry there was a mom and dad who had a daughter who plunged deep into sin. The couple went to a famous seminar and came back totally and completely convinced that they were the cause of the daughter's sin. I pointed out to them that their son was very faithful and he had been raised in the exact same environment as the daughter. Truth is their daughter's choices were not their fault, it was her fault. She chose to rebel and that is exactly what this son did here.

**Fact #2** - The son who fell into sin did so at great expense to the family. **15:12**

Sin is not cheap. There is a cost involved in rebellion and there is a high price to pay. If one is going to rebel, there will be a price to pay. In this case, the younger son wanted his father to give him his inheritance. He actually wants his father to foot-the-bill for his sin.

I have seen that. I knew of a son who actually stole money from his parents to buy drugs. I knew of a daughter whose parents paid for her college, while she partied the entire semester. I knew of a son who went to a God-mocking, Christ-rejecting college and expected his parents to pay for it.

To the Jew, the inheritance was critical because it meant that you inherited part of the Promised Land and the means to maintain it. According to O.T. Law, the youngest son was entitled to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the father's possessions, whereas the oldest son received a double portion or 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s (Deut. 21:17).

When the son made the request of his father for his portion, he did not tell him why he wanted it or what he intended to do with it. In fact, **verse 13** indicates he let several days pass, probably concealing the deceit of the episode. Abraham had given everything to Isaac before he died (Gen. 25:6). Isaac ended up turning things over to Jacob before he died (Gen. 27:25-29). Jacob turned everything over to his sons before he died (Gen. 48-49). The inheritance was critical to Israel.

Now you would think that a son receiving an inheritance from a father would say, what did my father do that gave him all of these blessings? What was his focus? But this boy does not think in those terms, most don't.

This son was doing something despicable. He is taking his Father's possessions and riches and plans to leave and waste it all pursuing sin. This is the same as taking a father's car to rob a bank or taking a father's home to commit immorality.

There are those who have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, who don't live for Him who are wasting the riches of God. They think very lightly of God's grace and they sell out for the enjoyment of sin.

**Fact #3** - The son who fell into sin had to relocate. **15:13**

This is important. This son knew there was no way he could pursue sin and continue to live at home. Shortly after receiving his inheritance, he went to a "distant country." That word "distant" means this was a country a long way off and very far away from home. Ungodliness wants to get away and move away from godliness. It wants to get as far away as it possibly can.

When he got far away from home, the text says he squandered his inheritance on "loose living."

That word “loose” (ασωτως) is one that means he squandered his inheritance on an “unsaved” lifestyle.

The father was a godly man who taught his children about sin and repentance (15:18). This son knew that in order for him to pursue sin he had to get away from his father and from his home. He knew that there was no way he could get away with living like an unsaved person as long as he was at home.

**This is a very important point to see; sometimes when a child leaves home in rebellion, it is a sign that the parents are very godly.**

The child realizes that his parents will not tolerate a life-style that rebels against God. This son thought if he had unlimited freedom, with no strings attached and no responsibilities, he could really enjoy life.

**Fact #4** - The son who fell into sin ended up completely destitute. 15:14

After the son had spent all of his money, a cosmic calamity hit. There was a severe famine, which left this son in total poverty. The word “impoverished” means he was way behind:

- 1) He had no money.
- 2) He had no support base.
- 3) He had no job.
- 4) He had no mother or father to help him.
- 5) He had no brother.
- 6) He had no friends.
- 7) He had no relatives.

This is quite a success story. He has gone from fortune to famine; from what he thought was total pleasure to total pain. The son wanted his freedom and he ends up in bondage. He is a broken down loser. If this son had not repented, the famine would have probably killed him.

When you run from where God wants you to be, the end result will be a famine. Run away from the word and will of God, and you will discover that the end result will not be a happy one.

**Fact #5** - The son who fell into sin ended up totally and completely humiliated. 15:15

Not only is this Jewish son broke like some skid row derelict, but he has to get a job working for some foreign citizen taking care of his swine. This was the lowest possible job for a Jew. This was something totally repulsive because these animals were unclean to the Jew (Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8; Is. 65:2-4).

What a pathetic picture of humiliation. This young Jewish boy could have been leading the Israelites and instead he is working for a godless foreigner taking care of swine.

Rebellion against God will ultimately leave one totally humiliated. Rebellion does not make a believer; it will break a believer.

**Fact #6** - The son who fell into sin literally was starving. **15:16**

The words “gladly filled” indicate that he was actually coveting the food of swine. What a total change of appetite. This is what sin does. It totally changes one’s appetite. What once looked repulsive now looks good and delicious.

The “pods” were little sickle-shaped pods of gelatin like a substance that comes from pods of the carob tree. He was so hungry that he was coveting hog food and the last clause of **verse 16** indicates no one was helping him or offering to help him. A famine had hit and these foreigners could care less if this Jew had any food to eat.

Where is the glamour now? Where are his friends? Where can he find a satisfying meal? This wandering into sin did not lead him to a happy life. Frankly, those who are godless could care less if you starve to death.

What a depressing picture. This is what sin will do.

Many years ago, a lady came to my office who had walked away from her Christian home to pursue sin. She was in her 30’s, but she looked like she was in her 50’s. She was thin and anemic. She had bags under her eyes and you could tell by the way she physically looked that her life had been rough. As we talked she shared how she had made a mess of things. She wanted to succeed in the big city so she left home. She got a high-paying job that she eventually lost. She began to cry and said, “I am all alone, I don’t know what to do, my life is a mess.”

Where is the glamour in that? Where is the happiness in this? This is where sin and rebellion will lead. It will lead to misery.

**NARRATIVE PART #2** – The son who fell into sin is broken and repents. **15:17-20a**

Thank God this story does not end at **verse 16**. What happens here is a model for anyone who has drifted away from God and from home. There are two critical facts brought out here:

**Fact #1** - The son remembered the blessings of his home. **15:17**

It not logical or rational for a person to stay in sin that is ruining their lives. This to me is a great indicator that this son was in fact a believer. The text says when the son “came to his senses.” While this son was in sin and rebellion, he was not in his right mind; he was not himself.

If you have ever been in a room when medication is being applied to an individual, the medicine starts to make a person drowsy to the point that he cannot think or speak properly. The believer who is in sin is the same way. He is drowsy and out of his mind.

The son remembered the wonderful blessing of home. He remembered that at his father's home people had plenty to eat. His father made sure that even the hired help was well-fed. His father had integrity and it was the high standard that caused him to want to go home.

This son is thinking about his father and the way he had been blessed. It is important for fathers to display a godly standard because it can and will impact the children later in life. This father would have made a terrible mistake if he would have lowered his standards to try to keep this boy at home. It was by not lowering his standards that made this boy want to go home.

**Fact #2** - The son remembered how to repent. **15:18-20**

This boy had been taught theology. By the way, I want to point out something. This boy does not think about killing himself, he thinks about getting right with God.

**Verse 18** makes it clear that this boy knows he has been living his life in sin. He knew what to do about it. This is textbook. He took five actions:

**(Action #1)** - He acknowledged he has sinned against God. **15:18b**

**(Action #2)** - He acknowledged he has sinned against his father. **15:18c**

**(Action #3)** - He acknowledged that he was not worthy of son ship. **15:19a**

**(Action #4)** - He acknowledged that he wanted to be a servant. **15:19b**

**(Action #5)** - He would go home and make things right. **15:20a**

The pride is all gone. Here is a complete reversal of thinking. Before he wanted to leave and now he wants to return home.

This is a great thing to observe. Perhaps some have wandered far away into sin. Perhaps you have not been too rational and you find yourself hungry and destitute. It is time to turn around and get back home.

There are five marks of true repentance here:

- 1) A willingness to admit the sin.
- 2) A willingness to admit one has sinned against God.
- 3) A willingness to admit one has sinned against others.
- 4) A willingness to admit one's unworthiness.
- 5) A willingness to face up to things.