

## Luke 15

### *The Father of Compassion and Celebration*

The challenge with preaching and hearing the message of the Parable of Prodigal Son is not the complexity, but our familiarity with it.

Even though it's familiar, it hasn't lost its beauty. Some call it the heart of Luke's gospel. There seems to be several main themes that stand out including repentance, grace, forgiveness, and joy.

Main idea: When lost sinners repent it brings great joy to God and should be great joy to us also.

This parable is not just a moving story, it's meant to move our heart to become more like God's.

- The parable we will look at (11-32) is one part of a larger unit. All of ch. 15 helps us understand the parable.

#### The Setting (v1-2)

- We see Jesus welcomes sinners who draw near to hear him. The religious elite did not like it, so they began to grumble. This prompts Jesus to tell 3 connected parables.

#### Set up

- The two short parables (lost sheep and lost coin) set up for the final one (The father and two sons)
- The first two parables are very similar in flow. Something is lost, which calls for earnest seeking. When it's found, there is great joy in celebration.
- Note, Jesus ends both parables by tagging a spiritual principle.  
—(v7): more joy over repentance of one sinner.  
—(v10): joy before angels of God over one sinner who repents.
- Jesus tells these parables to explain why he dines with the outcasts, why he welcomes sinners to his table of grace. It tied to his mission of seeking and saving lost.

We search for things we really value. The more value, the more intensely we search. If I lose my wallet or keys, life goes on pause. A child goes missing, the search is relentless because human life is priceless. If I lose my pen or some pocket change, I may take a few minutes but abandon mission. It's annoying, but not that valuable.

We see the escalation in value in the parables. One sheep out of a hundred, one coin out of ten, one son of two. We also go from property to a lost person, from the temporal to eternal.

1. Repentance through the eyes of the younger son (v11-20a)

- One thing we need to be cautious of in parables is assigning too much meaning to small details. Parables, I think, are big picture. If Jesus left out a detail we don't need to speculate on it. Let's just trace the major movements.

1. Movement away from home. Basically, this guy says he wants nothing to do with his father; he just wants money so he can go and do his own thing. He asks for his share (1/3 of estate according to Dt 21:17). And that is exactly what he gets.

*Principle: oftentimes if God gives us what we want and desire, it is the worst thing for us.*

(Rom 1:28)

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

2. Movement into desperation (v14-16)

- A perfect storm hits to undo the younger son. Through a series of awful choices, he spends all his money; then the country runs out of food. He gets so desperate that he enslaves himself and is still starving.
- Desperation leads to disillusionment, which probably sank him into some depression.

This often describes someone far from God. You've spent everything on yourself and you are empty.

3. A movement to return home (17-20a)

- The son realizes that he would rather be a slave in his father's house than starve in the pig sty. So, he begins the painful journey home to beg mercy from his father.

The story clearly stresses repentance (v17) — “came to himself” or “came to his senses” (NASB/CSB)

*The son has a change of heart!*

*That's what repentance is - when you have a major turn in life because of a change that has happened, or is happening in your heart.*

- But note where the change really takes place - in his relationship with his father. At the heart of the parable is a relational change that has taken place.

Every Christian has one major move—from being a child of wrath (Eph 2:3) to a child of love.

It's no surprise that the father becomes the overriding focus.

## 2. Compassion and celebration through the eyes of a loving father (20b-24)

- The word prodigal means to spend lavishly, excessively. It's the opposite of frugal. If the younger son was a prodigal in foolishness, the father is a prodigal in his love.

Instead of an ear-beating, instead of great displeasure and guilt piling, the father eagerly loves and celebrates his lost son. When the son makes his move home, the father makes his move in love, grace, and forgiveness.

- Two things stand out: 1) The father's compassion 2) The celebration.

- First, we see the compassion (v20). This is the climactic moment.

Compassion is when we feel sorry or pity for a person in their misery.

And quite frankly, it is not always the first response we have when someone has made a wreck of their life, especially someone we are close to and love.

- Look at the Father's compassion (v20): it's very action driven.
- Literally, the embrace is: "fell at his son's neck" (KJV).

- Second, see joy in the Father who calls for an immediate celebration. The picture of the father is so joy filled. He spares no expense to shower his joy at his son's return.

Look at what the celebration centered on (v24); written on the party invitation: The dead is alive again, the lost is found!

- This is how the Bible describes conversion. It's not just that his son made a good choice—he was given new life; he was redirected in a radical way that is nothing short of miraculous.

(Eph 2:1-5)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked.... <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Every Christian's birth story is a miracle story. The new birth is a miracle.

No preacher can preach this text worth his salt without speaking to the lost sons (and daughters) who might be here today or listening. If there is ever a picture of God's loving embrace of undeserving sinners who turn and repent, here it is. The Spirit may be telling you that you've spent enough time in the pig sty. Don't push it aside.

Draw near to Jesus. Come to your senses, come home to your Father. He has overflowing love and compassion. He is ready to hug your neck.

One preachers point here:

"Repent Because Sin Destroys our Lives"

*The destructive power of sin is not how your story needs to end.*

*Draw near friend. Find the Father's forgiveness and compassion.*

Also, a word to parents of prodigals. This is probably the number one pastoral issue dealt with among believing church members.

Don't give up hope. If this parable were a real story no doubt this father had many sleepless nights, like some of you. Keep on in faith, hope, and love. God is in the business of many miracle birth stories.

This is not the end of the story. Sadly, it does not have a happy ending. It's an awkward ending filled with a knot in the stomach and family tension.

3. Angry protest through the eyes of the older brother (25-32)

- The elder son moves curiously toward the party. But when he finds out who it is for, his hand goes up and his heart turns away. He stops moving.

(v28) In anger he refuses to celebrate.

- The exchange he has with the father is pretty clear. He protests the father's grace, questions his generosity.

The elder brother lacks the joy and compassions that marks his father; he does not resemble the father.

- Note in vs 30 what he is good at: list-keeping and faultfinding.
- He finds fault both with his brother's foolishness and his father's grace. He looks more like the faultfinding Pharisees and less like his father.

I have a rule of thumb when I get involved in marriage counseling. I can usually tell how bad the shape of the marriage is by how long the list is at the first counseling session. The longer the list, the more anger and resentment is built up, the more elder brother tendencies there are.

The principle is that the longer your fault list, the more impossible it is to look at someone through the eyes of grace. List-keepers always think they deserve a lot better. That's not a heart of grace. In my observation and experience, the more Biblical truth we know, the more we have to be on high alert for elder brother tendencies in our own hearts.

#### Conclusion:

When I was a worker at UPS, I had it on my heart to share the gospel with a certain coworker. One day I had the opportunity. He asked a question about school and I used it as an opportunity to share this parable. I focused on the two brothers. And I remember the guy's response:

"Which son am I?" He understood the parable. It forces us to ask which brother do I resemble?

I think the response digs deeper: Do I truly have a heart like God's heart—one of compassion for the lost and celebration? Where is my joy really found? Is it in God's radical work of grace in the lives of messy people?

If someone who has a history and their life is a train-wreck, gets interested in Jesus, how will I respond? What if that person—interested in Jesus, but with some rough really rough edges—showed up at small group tonight? Would you be happy, comfortable, or agitated? Would you be happy to see them the following week?

The question is not just what person am I, but what church are we? Are we the church of the elder brother or compassionate Father?

May God give us a heart like his, one of compassion for the lost and great celebration at their return.