

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Participant: Week of 8/26/2018

HIGHLIGHT: Luke 15:11-32

H

¹¹He also said: "A man had two sons.

¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living.

¹⁴After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. ¹⁵Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to eat his fill from the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any. ¹⁷When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.'

²⁰So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. ²¹The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²²"But the father told his slaves, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on

him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, ²⁴because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he summoned one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷'Your brother is here,' he told him, 'and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸"Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he replied to his father, 'Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.'

³¹"'Son,' he said to him, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."



EXPLAIN

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one of Jesus' most famous. As we study it, let's notice that it is not necessarily about a son who ran away, but about the Father who rejoices when His children return to Him. God showers His forgiveness upon all who would repent and return to Him.

- v.11** Jesus told this parable as the last in a set of three, all of which worked toward the same end: demonstrating the joy that the Father has when the lost are returned to Him. Verse 11 sets out the three characters in the Prodigal Son parable: the younger son (who represents wayward sinners), the father (who represents God), and the older son (who represents the Pharisees).
- v.12** In his commentary on Luke, Norvall Geldenhuys notes that a son could technically ask for his inheritance at any point, and that he did not necessarily need to wait for his father to die. The son's insistence at receiving his inheritance early, however, would have been deeply insensitive. This son could not even wait for his father to die before selfishly demanding his portion of the father's money.
- v.16-17** "No one would give him anything" elicits an emotional response to us who are reading this. It is true that he brought this on himself with his reckless ("prodigal") living, but it still moves us to pity him. It hurts to see somebody reach this level of need. However, the beginning of v.17 tells us why "No one would give him anything" was so crucial: it was only when this prodigal son had come to the end of himself that he got up and found his way back to his father's arms.
- v.20** "While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him" indicates that the father had been habitually watching for his return. This verse has prompted some (like Helmut Thielicke) to title this "The Parable of the Waiting Father."
- v.25** At this point, the parable takes a turn that the previous ones did not. Both the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin ended with celebration, but Jesus had not yet made His point. What is most crucial here is the reaction that the older son has to the restoration of his brother. Rather than being overjoyed that the lost has been found (just as the reaction was in the previous two parables), he is bitter and angry that the restored son has gotten a party. This older son represents the Pharisees, to whom Jesus was speaking. If we are in a relationship with Jesus for what we can get from Him, perhaps our relationship with Jesus should be questioned.



APPLY

1. What stuck out to you or challenged you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. In verse 17, the prodigal son “came to his senses.” Tell about a time when you’ve had to come to your senses. What caused you to realize you had to? What came of this situation.
3. Look at the beginning of Chapter 15. Who is Jesus’ audience? What are some differences between the types of people represented? How do you see these people represented in the parable? How do you see these people in the church today?
4. What does the father’s reaction to seeing the son returning home tell you about God? Have you ever encountered this aspect of God before? Do you feel like you need to?
5. Which son do you feel like you are? What do you need to give up in order to come back to the Father? A prodigal life? A reliance on self-righteous religiosity?

RESPOND

- Make a list of things that came to your mind in Question 5. Commit to dropping something that needs to be dropped so that you can run back to the Father who is waiting for you with open arms.

