

THE PRODIGAL SON

TEXT: LUKE 15:11-32

Introduction:

1. I mentioned last week that many Bible teachers, such as I.M. Haldeman, have taught that there is only one parable in Luke 15, and it has three parts to it (15:3, 8, 11).
2. If that is true, then perhaps we should not refer to this as “The Parable of the Prodigal Son,” but rather, “The Story of the Parable Son.”
3. Over 100 years ago, Charles Haddon Spurgeon published a book entitled, *Lectures to my Students*. It is a collection of addresses delivered to the students in his “Pastors’ (Bible) College” in London, England.
4. One of the chapters is entitled, “Anecdotes from the Pulpit.” In this chapter, Spurgeon said, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, the great teacher of teachers, did not disdain the use of anecdotes. To my mind it seems clear that certain of His parables were facts and, consequently, anecdotes. May not the story of the Prodigal Son have been a literal truth?”
5. In any event, this story is probably the most well-known of all the parables. Charles Dickens said it was the greatest short story ever written.
6. It has been called the pearl and crown of all the parables.
7. Many years ago, evangelist J. Wilbur Chapman was invited to preach in the prison at Joliet, Illinois. The man who invited him said, “The warden told me to say to you, sir, that if you could come next Sunday, he asks that you not to preach on the prodigal son. We have had twenty-four ministers, and every single one of them has preached on the prodigal son, and these poor fellows have had about as much of the prodigal son as they can stand.”
8. J. Wilbur Chapman said, “Very well. Tell the warden that I shall choose another theme.”
9. Referring to his decision to accommodate the warden, J. Wilbur Chapman wrote years later, “I have often thought that it was a mistake. Nearly always when I have an opportunity to speak in prison I turn instinctively to this picture.”

10. Well, the story of the prodigal son isn't only an appropriate message for prison. It is appropriate everywhere in all different circumstances.
11. For example, there may be a "prodigal son" here this evening.
12. Perhaps you have not literally gone off into a "far country," but you have departed from the straight and narrow road that leads to everlasting life, and are traveling on the wide road that leads to destruction.
13. The key word in this parable is "lost" (15:24, 32). This parable is the third in a series about lost things.
14. In verses 3--7, our Lord told the story of the lost sheep.
15. In verses 8--10, He told the story of the lost coin.
16. Then here in verses 11--32, He told the story of the lost son.
17. The key word in all three parables is "lost" (15:4, 6, 9, 24, 32).
18. Preachers do not preach much anymore about sinners being lost.
19. L.R. Scarborough said, "Considered in the light of eternity, it is the most distressful word in all the languages of men."
20. *Strong's Concordance* says the Greek word translated "lost" means, "to be ruined, destroyed, or to give over to eternal misery in hell."
21. In fact, this same word is often translated "perish."
22. Our Lord said in Luke 13:3 and 5, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."
23. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).
24. The parable of the prodigal son is about rebellion, repentance, and restoration.

I. REBELLION (15:11-16).

1. The prodigal son did not want to wait to receive his inheritance, and so he demanded his father give it to him right away (15:12).
2. We do not know all the details of the prodigal son's rebelliousness, but we know enough.
 - Luke 15:13 says he, "wasted his substance with riotous living." "And when he had spent all..." (15:14).
 - The word "prodigal" means "wasteful."

- The self-centered life is a wasted life.
 - He spent his entire inheritance and wound up feeding swine (15:13-16). This was a humiliating job for a Jew.
 - His older brother said to his father in verse 30 that the prodigal son "hath devoured thy living with harlots."
3. The prodigal son went off into a "far country" (far from home, far from his father, and far from God), and fell in with bad company.
 4. First Corinthians 15:33 says, "Be not deceived: evil communications (bad companions) corrupt good manners."
 5. The "far country" (15:13) represents the world with all of its sin and folly. Sinners go deep into the far country and waste their lives in "riotous living" - drinking, drugs, gambling, and immorality.
 6. There's an old statement, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."
 7. It has been truly said that riotous living is the deadliest way to exhaust the body, debase the mind, destroy the substance, and damn the soul.
 8. "And when he had spent all..." (15:14). He lived it up with drunkards and harlots, but eventually his money ran out.
 9. The Bible teaches that sin brings pleasure, but it is only "for a season." Hebrews 11:25 says Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, "than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."
 10. There is some enjoyment and pleasure in riotous living but it is only for a short "season." Then comes the terrible consequences (Luke 15:14-16). Sin has an expensive price tag.
 11. There are immoral men who now have to live with herpes and AIDS.
 12. There are drunkards with cirrhosis of the liver.
 13. There are sinners who have lost their jobs, broke up their families, destroyed their health, and ruined their lives through sin.

14. "There arose a mighty famine in that land..." (15:14). Sinful men help to bring about famine because they are always consuming and wasting and spending, but never producing.
15. But nevertheless God used the famine to bring the prodigal son to his senses (15:17).
16. God allows human circumstances (famine, floods, wars, earthquakes, etc.) to hasten the consequences of sin. Many a prodigal son has been reached after falling headfirst into the pig pen.
17. "And he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine" (15:14b, 15). There is great irony here. This rebellious son wanted to be free from his father's control, but then he became dependent upon a total stranger!
18. He could not live under the same roof with his godly father, but now he is forced to live with filthy hogs (15:15).
19. Shame, contempt, disgrace, and distress always follow rebelliousness. It has truly been said, "He who will not be a son of God, must be a slave to the devil!"
20. And there is no slave-master as cruel as Satan, and no yoke so heavy as sin!
21. This prodigal son was so desperate he would have liked to fill his starving belly with the husks the swine ate (15:16). He ate well at his father's table, but now he was eating with the pigs.
22. But thank God..."he came to himself" (15:17).
23. John Newton wrote, "Afflictions, though they seem severe; In mercy oft are sent; They stopped the prodigal's career, And forced him to repent."

II. REPENTANCE

1. "And when he came to himself..." (15:17). This means he repented.
2. Along with the word "lost," repentance is another key word in these three parables (cf. 15:7, 10). Modern day preaching is very weak on repentance. But this has been a problem for a long time.

3. One hundred years ago, evangelist R.A. Torrey said, "There surely is not the emphasis laid upon repentance in modern preaching that there is in the Bible" (*What the Bible Teaches*).
4. C.H. Spurgeon said, "Sometimes we are inclined to think that a very great portion of modern revivalism has been more a curse than a blessing, because it has led thousands to a kind of peace before they have known their misery; restoring the prodigal to the Father's house, and never making him say, 'Father, I have sinned.' How can he be healed who is not sick? or he be satisfied with the bread of life who is not hungry? The old-fashioned sense of sin is despised, and consequently a religion is run up before the foundations are dug out. Everything in this age is shallow. Deep-sea fishing is almost an extinct business so far as men's souls are concerned. The consequence is that men leap into religion, and then leap out again. Unhumbled they came to the church, unhumbled they remained in it, and unhumbled they go from it" (*The Berean Call*).
5. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "In Scripture, the words 'I have sinned' are said by eight different men. Four times they are said without reality – by Pharaoh, Balaam, Saul, and Judas. Four times they are said in sincerity – by Job, Achan, David, and the Prodigal Son" (*Outline Studies in Luke*).
6. There has to be genuine repentance in order to be right with God. Evangelist Vance Havner said, "If they had a social gospel in the days of the prodigal son, somebody would have given him a bed and a sandwich and he never would have gone home."
7. Proponents of the social gospel says the church's mission is to feed the homeless and give them a comfortable place to stay. But the true Gospel is to get sinners saved. And this begins with repentance.
8. Many sinners have been given nice new clothes, and a nice place to live, etc. but they never got their heart right with God. So before you know it they are right back in the hog pen!
9. "And when he came to himself..." (15:17). This means that before he came to himself he wasn't in his right mind. Sinners are not in their right mind!
10. Billy Sunday saw an insane asylum on fire one night. He saw firemen bravely rushing into the fire and rescuing the mental patients. But he saw one patient turn around and run back into the fire!
11. A fireman had to go back into the fire and rescue him a second time, and then a third time until the man had to be forcibly restrained.

12. Billy Sunday said it reminded him of the madness of sin. Sinners seem determined to rush headlong straight into the fires of hell!
13. Another preacher spoke of angels perched up on the battlements of heaven, and looking down upon earth. He said this, "Perhaps if we could see things as these bright intelligences see them, who are permitted to hover round this world of ours, and to be witnesses of human action, we should be disposed to regard this world of ours as one great lunatic asylum. It must seem strange to them that to men and women there should be made such glorious offers, that before their eyes there should be spread such magnificent possibilities, and that in the folly of their unbelief they should turn their back upon their own truest interest, and sin against their own souls. Lunatics indeed!" (W. Hay Aitken, *The Story of the Prodigal*).

III. RESTORATION

1. There can be no genuine restoration without genuine repentance (15:17-22).
2. The prodigal son not only said, "I will arise and go to my father..." (15:18), but he did arise and go to his father (15:20, 21).
3. Many people talk about getting right with God, but they never actually do it.
4. Spurgeon asks, "What led him back to his father?" And then he answered his own question: His memory aroused him; his misery bestirred him; his fear of hunger whipped him; his hope drew him; and his resolve moved him!
5. We have in this parable a wonderful illustration of God's grace. The prodigal son had his speech all prepared but his father wouldn't let him finish (15:22). Isaac Watts wrote,

*6. Behold the wretch whose lust and wine
Had wasted his estate,
He begs a share among the swine,
To taste the husks they eat!*

*I die with hunger here, he cries,
"I starve in foreign lands;
My father's house has large supplies,
And bounteous are his hands.*

*I'll go, and with a mournful tongue
Fall down before his face—
Father, I've done thy justice wrong,
Nor can deserve thy grace.”*

*He said, and hastened to his home,
To seek his father's love;
The father saw the rebel come,
And all his bowels move.*

*He ran, and fell upon his neck,
Embraced and kissed his son;
The rebel's heart with sorrow brake
For follies he had done.*

*Take off his clothes of shame and sin,
The father gives command,
“Dress him in garments white and clean,
With rings adorn his hand.*

*A day of feasting I ordain,
Let mirth and joy abound;
My son was dead, and lives again,
Was lost, and now is found.”*

7. The father represents God the Father – full of love and compassion (15:20-24).
8. D.L. Moody said the prodigal son lost his home; he lost his food; and he lost his testimony; but he never lost his father's love.
9. It doesn't matter how far a sinner gets from God; if he makes his way back God will meet him, and forgive him, and restore him.
10. The prodigal son rebelled.
11. The prodigal son repented.
12. And then the prodigal son rejoiced (15:24).

CONCLUSION:

1. William Kirkpatrick wrote hundreds of hymns and Gospel songs. For many of them, like “He Hideth My Soul,” and “Lead Me to Calvary,” and “Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus,” he wrote the music, and others wrote the words.
2. But some of the songs Kirkpatrick wrote both the words and the music.
3. One of these songs was “Lord, I’m Coming Home.” Kirkpatrick wrote this song at a camp meeting in Rawlinsville, Pennsylvania, with a very specific purpose: to win the soul of his soloist, an unbeliever.
4. After Kirkpatrick prayed for the young man, these words came to him. He wrote them down quickly, and after the soloist sang them that night, he became a Christian.

*I’ve wandered far away from God,
Now I’m coming home;
The paths of sin too long I’ve trod,
Lord, I’m coming home.*

*Coming home, coming home,
Nevermore to roam,
Open wide Thine arms of love,
Lord, I’m coming home.*

*I’ve wasted many precious years,
Now I’m coming home;
I now repent with bitter tears,
Lord, I’m coming home.*

*I’m tired of sin and straying, Lord,
Now I’m coming home;
I’ll trust Thy love, believe Thy Word,
Lord, I’m coming home.*