

WEEK 42- THE KING AND PRODIGALS

LUKE 15: 11-32

OCTOBER 19-20, 2019

Summary and Goal:

Often times it is difficult to remember how much God truly loves us, to the point He is willing to not only go searching for us but celebrate when we are found. In the Gospel Era, Jesus will use parables to capture the attention of the listeners, allowing them to see themselves in the story. This familiar story is often known as the "Prodigal Son" is one that is timeless because it deals with the eternal truth, we are all sinners in need of a savior; we all were once lost and needed to be found.

Main Passages:

Luke 15:11-32; Chronological Bible, October 19th, pg. 1361-1362

Session Outline:

1. We Have All Sinned and Run Away from God (Luke 15:11-16)
2. God (the Father) Wants Us to Return to Him (Luke 15:17-24)
3. Self-Righteousness also Separates Us from the Father (Luke 15:26-32)

Session in a Sentence:

God is a loving Father willing to search for us, forgiving us for our sin and rebellion; celebrating when we are connected with Him in relationship.

Kingdom Connection:

The Kingdom of God is based on a relationship through Jesus Christ. From the time of Adam and Eve, we have been separated from God in need to be saved. God provided a way for all people to have salvation when we believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. As sinners we come in humility believing Jesus and ready to repent, thus becoming part of the family of God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Introduction:

“That’s not fair! He didn’t do any of the work!” Many of us have said something like this internally or externally after getting graded on a group project. In any kind of group or partner project, you will often get one person who does not pull their weight, and it feels extremely unfair when they get the same grade as the rest of the people in their group who did all the work. When we do the work, we want the credit. Something just feels wrong when someone gets rewarded when someone else did the work.

Imagine a wealthy, aging, and ailing mother with three children. One of the children (the oldest, probably) spends countless hours taking care of her mother: driving her to the doctor, doing housework for her, making sure she takes her medicine, keeping her company, helping her manage and pay bills, taking her to do errands, and countless other things. The other two children go to visit the mother once or twice a year, but they put in virtually no effort in comparison to their older sister. The older sister is frustrated with her siblings, but she feels a sense of duty and loyalty to her mother. Besides, her mom will definitely reward her for all her hard work and dedication, right? When the mother passes away, they gather together to look at their mother’s will, only to find that all 3 siblings get an equal split of the inheritance. In this scenario, how do you think the oldest sister would feel? Probably more than a little bit bitter, right?

In this iconic story of the lost son (or the Prodigal Son, as it is most widely known), Jesus deals with the themes of a God (the father) looking for those who are lost (the prodigal), and pleading with those who are judgmental of sinners and bitter at God’s grace (the older brother). As we read through this passage, it is important for us to discern which brother we relate to at the moment, and ask ourselves how we must appropriately respond to this insightful parable.

Background:

In order to fully understand this story, we must understand Jesus’ audience. In Luke 14, the multitudes were following Jesus and listening to His teaching. At the beginning of chapter 15, we read that the tax collectors and sinners began to draw near to Him in order to hear Him speak. The Pharisees and scribes began to complain that Jesus was associating and eating with unclean, immoral, and evil sinners. Jesus then goes on to tell three consecutive stories to everyone who can hear. In the first story, Jesus describes a shepherd with 100 sheep, who leaves everything to go find the one sheep who has run away. In the second story, Jesus describes a woman with 10 silver coins, who after losing one coin, turns over her entire house until she finds the one lost coin. At the conclusion of the story with the shepherd and his sheep, Jesus says this: *“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”* Jesus clearly has two kinds of people in mind, 1) lost sinners in need of repentance, and 2) those who do not think they need repentance. Jesus had both of those groups listening to Him right at that moment! He had the sinners (the prostitutes, tax collectors, Law-breakers, and unclean people) and the

“older brothers” (the Pharisees, the scribes, and other religious leaders) standing right in front of Him as He spoke.

1. We Have All Sinned and Run Away From God

Luke 15: 11 Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to Luke 15: 11 them his livelihood. ¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the ^l pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. (Chronological Bible, October 19th, pg. 1361-1362)

What does it say?

Jesus wants the listener (or the reader) to be thinking about the lost sheep and the lost coin as we go into this new story. We read about a man (surely a wealthy man) with two sons. The younger son is wild and irresponsible, and the older son is the responsible, straight-laced, and loyal type. The younger son comes to the father and demands his inheritance immediately. When do people usually receive an inheritance from their parents? It’s when they die. In other words, this younger son was declaring that he wished his father dead just so he could have his allotted money and possessions. The younger son then goes off to another country and blows his inheritance on cheap, wild, and licentious living.

It is difficult to fathom the callousness, the selfishness, the short-sightedness, and the cruelty of the younger son to do this to his father. He wounded his father, he showed hatred to his father, he took from his father, and he abandoned his father. After blowing all of his money, the son was relegated to feeding pigs in a foreign country and was so down and out that he wished that he could eat the disgusting slop that he was being forced to feed to the pigs. Remember, Jesus is speaking to a Jewish audience, which means that feeding pigs would be just about the lowest job possible for them to imagine. Feeding pigs as a Jew meant being completely alienated from God and His people, not to mention the obvious fact that the son had alienated himself from his family.

What does it mean?

With this story, Jesus has gotten to the heart of the matter of His previous stories of the sheep and the coins. God is the shepherd, the woman who lost the coin, and now the father of these two boys. The lost sheep and the lost coin both represent the same reality: lost **people**. The things that God cares about are not things, but **people** who have gone astray. The Jews in Jesus’ audience would have understood this well enough, that there were people who have

strayed away from God. The sinners knew that they had strayed away from God by breaking His Law and hurting others. The tax collectors took money from their own people to give to the Romans and line their own pockets. The prostitutes gave away their bodies for money and were shamed by their society and alienated from religious life as a result.

The Pharisees and the scribes were quick to recognize the people in the stories that were far away from God. In their mind, the Jews who did not follow God's Law (given by Moses) had spat in the face of God. In the minds of the Pharisees and scribes, the sinners had rejected their inheritance as God's people, and they were the reason that God had not yet made Israel a great nation. The Pharisees and scribes viewed sinners as filthy, selfish, disgusting, and far from God. They would have been nodding in approval at Jesus' description of the prodigal younger son who betrayed his father and abandoned his family.

But Jesus was not talking about simply the breaking of the Law of Moses. He was talking about a much deeper problem: He was talking about the root issue of **sin**. The younger brother represents all people who sin and run away from God. Sin (with a capital S) is the root heart issue that leads us to commit individual sins. Our hearts are turned in a posture of rebellion against God, and this is evidenced by our individual acts of selfishness, sexual immorality, greed, untruthfulness, laziness, and countless other things. Jesus was trying to make clear to the sinners in the audience why their sin was an issue in the first place. God was not simply angry with the sinners for breaking His Law, but He was grieved for them because they were alienated from Him and imprisoned by their own selfishness and sin. In addition to this, Jesus was trying to communicate to the scribes and Pharisees that they too were alienated from God because of sin, even if they did not realize it just yet.

2. God (the Father) Wants Us to Return to Him

***Luke 15: 17** "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"*

²⁰ "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. ²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. (Chronological Bible pg. 1362, October 19th)

What does it say?

Sitting in his own filth and loneliness, the younger brother finally comes to his senses. He realizes that he needs to return back home. At first, he thinks he should beg his father to let him return as a hired servant, and he makes the decision to go back to his father. When the father sees the son a long way off, he runs to his son, embraces and kisses him, and restores him back to his full position and inheritance as a son in his household. He even throws a feast so that all can celebrate the return of his lost son.

What does it mean?

Jesus makes it crystal clear that God wants those who have run away from Him to **decide** to return back to Him in humility. Jesus wants sinners to see the reality of our situation when we are in sin. We are not in control, we are not happy, and we are not ok. Sin has a way of trapping us, isolating us, and keeping us from experiencing the fulfilled life that we were created to live. All along, the father wanted his son to return to Him. So, when the son decides to come back, the Father runs to meet him far away, to embrace him and to restore him.

So, what exactly is Jesus saying? He is saying that God desires sinners to repent and come back to Him. He is saying that running away from God does not seal our fate and that God will run to whoever **decides** to return to Him. So, what exactly does this look? The Pharisees and scribes would have thought that 'returning to God' would look like committing to obey the Scriptures and to keep the Law and be put in right standing with God. But when we look at Jesus' teachings in other parts of the gospels, we see that He has different ideas than the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus says multiple times that **deciding** to return to God is very simple: it means **believing** in Jesus, the Word of God. *"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40)."*

Anyone who wants to return to the Father needs only to believe in Jesus, the fullest self-revelation of God's character. The father wanted his son to come home, and God wants every sinner to come to Him through belief in Jesus.

3. Self-Righteousness Also Separates Us From the Father

Luke 15: 25 *"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'*

²⁸ *"But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted*

calf for him.’³¹ “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.’³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ” (Chronological Bible pg. 1362, October 19th)

What does it say?

At this point, the story takes a somber turn. The older brother, who had been loyal to his father even after the abandonment of the younger son, hears the celebration and joy at the return of his younger brother. When he sees how the father has forgiven the younger brother and accepted him, he becomes angry and refuses to go in. The Father then goes out to meet him and plead with him to come in and celebrate, but the older brother airs his grievance with the father. *“I have served you for years and never done anything wrong to you! I have done everything you asked, but what has that gotten me! Now, this rotten guy who betrayed you comes back, and you have given him everything! How could you do this to me?”* The Father then pleads with the son and tells him that everything belongs to him, and he should celebrate with his younger brother.

What does it mean?

It is interesting that we do not find out the conclusion of the story. Jesus does not tell us how the older brother responds to the Father’s pleading. Why is that? The answer is pretty simple, the end of the story had not yet happened. The older brother is the scribes and the Pharisees, the younger brother is the sinners (even including the Gentiles), and the Father is God. The sinners betrayed God and ran far away from Him, but now some of them were returning to God by believing in Jesus. God was ready to reward these returned sinners with celebration, and the Pharisees were watching it play out in front of them. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and wicked people were being healed and having their lives changed by Jesus. According to Jesus, the Pharisees and the scribes, who had been obsessively keeping God’s Laws hoping to see the fulfillment of His promises, now needed to make a choice about how to respond to Jesus. Would they rejoice to see lost sons and daughters returning to God? Or would they become bitter and grumble because these sinners would get all the rewards for which they themselves had worked so hard?

Are you the younger brother or the older brother?

Now is a good time for each one of us to evaluate ourselves. Are you the younger brother or the older brother?

Younger Brother?

Do you have unresolved areas of sin in your life? Do you continually go back to the same broken attempts at self-gratification? Are you allowing your pride to direct you to hurt others and run away from God? The younger brother disowned his Father and wished Him dead. If

you have areas of sin in your life that you have not dealt with, then you are disowning and hurting God in the same way as the younger brother did with the Father. Do you find yourself living in the filth of your own sin? Do you feel like you have squandered away all the gifts that God has given you? If you are in this situation, Jesus is calling on you to **decide to repent and change direction**. Repentance comes from believing in Jesus and changing our actions. If you are the younger brother in any area of your life right now, then you need to come home.

Older Brother?

Are you a rule follower by nature? Have you put time, energy, and effort into keeping God's laws and pleasing Him? Do you find it hard when you see other Christians who continue to sin? Do you find it easy to judge others for their indiscretions? Have you ever felt bitter about others getting the recognition that you think you deserve? This was the situation that the Jews found themselves in. One of the key things to understand from this text is that being the older brother is a state of mind. It is a state of judgmentalism and an inability to see and care about the things that God cares about. Why is that? Because even if you are the older brother, you have sinned just like the younger brother! Every single one of us has wandered away from God like the younger brother, but your troubles will be compounded if you take on the attitude of the older brother. Jesus is calling you to rejoice when lost sinners come back home, and just like with the older brother in the story, He is calling you to come back home as well.

Conclusion:

- **God speaks** through simple stories to capture the serious plight of rebels, blatant sinners and moralistic sinners.
- **God acts** to restore anyone who will come to Him in humility and repentance.
- **God reveals** the lostness of self-righteous moralists and pleasure-seeking rebels and His love for both.