

The Prodigal Son

A few weeks ago we went through the story of the Sower and the seeds. You remember that we said that that story was told by Jesus, and was called a “parable.” Jesus told many parables, which were stories that had a spiritual meaning. They talked about everyday things like flowers, trees, kings, servants, and animals. Jesus used them to convey truth that would make it easier to understand for those who were seeking for God’s truth, and to hide it from those who did not want to follow what God said. The parable of the sower talked about how the Word of God works in different people’s lives. We said that three of the soils represented hearts where God’s Word could not work, because they were either too hard, too rocky, or too thorny. The last soil represented a heart that was able to receive God’s Word and produce good things for God. If you were not able to hear that broadcast, you may download a copy of it from our website.

I would like to look at a different parable this week. It is another story that is very familiar. It is found in Luke 15, and so if you have your Bibles, please turn in them to Luke 15. Luke is the third book in the New Testament, and the story starts in verse 11, which says: “A certain man had two sons.” Jesus doesn’t give many details because this is a made-up story, but it starts with three characters: A father, an older son, and a younger son. No mother is mentioned in this story, because in it, God represents the father, and God has no wife. Besides that, in Jewish culture, the father was the head of the house, and responsible for what happened there. The young man represents mankind. As we go along, let us look at the parallels in this story.

Verse 12 introduces the conflict into the story: “And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” The younger son comes to his father and demands that he have the portion of his inheritance. Most parents store some things away for their children to have and use. Some of you might be trying to save some money for your children. There is nothing wrong with that, but how would any of you feel if your children came to you and asked for their inheritance now instead of later? No doubt you would be affronted by this insolence. You see, this young man was treating this inheritance as if it were his, but it actually belonged to his father.

He showed by this action that he had no regard for his father for two reasons. One is this: if his father were going to give his inheritance to them, he would have to either sell everything he had or give what he had between the two. This would leave him with nothing. The second reason is this: in the culture of the day, asking your father for your inheritance before his death was essentially saying to him: “I wish you were dead!” This young man does not care one bit for his father, but only for himself. He wanted what he had coming to him, and didn’t care who he had to hurt to get it.

This represents our attitude toward God. The Bible says that we are all born sinners. Every sin can be boiled down to one thing: selfishness. We steal because we think we deserve something more than someone else. We lie because we don’t want to get caught. We gossip and slander because we want to look better than someone else. We hate others because we want our way. All sin is basically selfishness. This young man is a perfect picture of all of us. The Bible says in the book of Genesis that God created man to fellowship with Him and to keep his Earth. However, we, through Adam, decided that we wanted what we thought would be best for us. Even today, when we sin, we are saying to God: “I want what I want!” This was the attitude of this younger son.

Verse 12 tells us what the father did: “And he divided unto them his living.” The father, despite the impertinence, gives both his sons what the younger son has asked for. In that culture, the firstborn always got a double inheritance, and so the younger son received one-third of what his father owned. God does not always keep from you what is not best. God has given to every human a free will, and that means that we can all choose to do or not do what God says. Many people want to live their lives completely apart from God, and God will give them what they want for a time, even though life without God is hopeless and meaningless.

It didn't take very long for the younger son to act on what his heart wanted. Verse 13 says "And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country." Proverbs 20:21 says "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed." This young man was dead-set on getting his inheritance, and as soon as he had it, he removed any doubt of his hatred for his father by moving out of the house. This text says that the young man not only moved out of his house, but took a journey into a far country. That tells me that he went away from his house, his village, and his people. He wanted no reminder of the man he was before, so moved to another country.

In the culture of the day, your family and village were everything. You could not survive on your own without the support of your family. Your life did not exist outside of your village, made up largely of extended and distant family. But this young man thought he could make it on his own, so left the house, and went to the pagan Gentiles, away from God-worshippers. His actions spoke to the fact that he wanted nothing more to do with God. This also is a good description of us. Jeremiah 17:9 says "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" We are all born wicked people who long to be away from God's watchful eye. Isaiah 53:6 says "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Romans 3:10-12 says this: "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." A few verses later says this: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." We are all gone away from God.

Furthermore, we all enjoy living lives apart from God. Job 15:16 says that man drinks sin like water. Proverbs 2:12-14 describe mankind like this: he leaves the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness. He rejoices to do evil, and delights in the frowardness of the wicked." Romans 1:32 is probably the most damning. It says "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." That says that those who know what God's judgment will be still do wrong things, and love to do them. We see that this young man at the end of verse 13: "wasted his substance with riotous living." We don't know what that entailed, but we know that whatever he wanted, he got for himself. The Bible uses the word "wasted" instead of "spent." He did not invest his money wisely, but wasted it. Later in the story seems to indicate that this young man was spending his money on harlots. Whatever it was, it was what he wanted, and it was a waste.

This is the picture of a lost son. You see, Luke 15 is not just one story, but the last of three stories. The first story, found in verses 4-7, tell the story of a lost sheep. Jesus says that there was a shepherd who had 100 sheep, and one of them left the fold and was lost. Jesus said that the shepherd leaves his 99 and goes to look for the one lost sheep. God cares about the lost, even if it is 1% of what is there. The next story, found in verses 8-10 tells the story of a woman who has ten coins and loses one. These were not just any coins used for commerce. The coins were a part of the woman's dowry. They were a set in a chain, and would be worn on her head like a tiara on her wedding day. Imagine the woman's horror when she realized that her wedding veil had a gaping hole. The woman sweeps the house looking for the one coin out of ten that she has lost. God cares about the lost, even if it is 10% of what is there. In this story, we see one of the two sons running off. This is the parable of the lost son.

But the happiness of this man is short-lived. We see in verse 14 that "when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want." The young man spent all of his money, and as he was giving away his last dime, the report came that there was a famine in this land. Food would be hard to come by, and this young man had just wasted his living, or rather his father's living, on things that weren't as important. Proverbs 21:17 says "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." Proverbs 21:20 says "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up." The Bible says that this man began to be in want.

This is the state that many find themselves. They think that they don't need God for anything, and that life would be better lived without Him. Things will go well for awhile, until they really need there to be a God. You see, God promises peace to His children. Those who have lived a life without any regard to God aren't His children, and so when they need peace, they don't have it. The Bible says that God protects those who are His own. Those who have enjoyed life without God will not enjoy His protection. Psalms 107:17 says "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." This man left his father, village, and land of his people, and suddenly found himself in need of them. He had no God to call to, no father to ask for help.

But this young man will not humble himself. Not yet, not while he has other options. Verse 15 says "And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." This young man decided to stay in that pagan land and hired himself out to someone in that country. But the only job he could find was feeding pigs. The Jewish hearer of this story would have cringed, and realized that this young man was in a downward spiral. There were three problems with the fact that this young man was feeding swine. Problem #1 is that feeding pigs in general, especially in those days, is a stinky, unpleasant job. Problem #2 is that pigs were considered unclean by Jews. God had given a list of animals that were unclean to them, and on that list was a pig. Problem #3 is this: while Israelites sacrificed bulls, goats, and sheep to God, Pagans generally sacrificed pigs to their deities. It is possible, and quite probable, that these pigs were being raised for use in the pagan temples. This makes where this young man is all the worse. He was part and parcel with the pagan temple.

But even though it was work for the young man, we see that it did not solve his problems. Verse 16 says "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him." The man was feeding the pigs "husks," which in the day were small beans from the carob tree. They were a sweet pod that could be eaten, but was not very palatable. It was the food of the poor and the animals. This man began to be so hungry that he began to desire even these carob pods. This young man, once the third in command over a house full of servants, is now envious over pigs. Proverbs 27:7 says "The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." This man was finally at the bottom.

Finally, he comes to himself and has an important realization. Luke 15:17 says "And when he came to himself, he said, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'" He starts to think about how silly it is for him to be starving while his father employs men who have enough food, and even some to spare. They had enough food back at home, and he is forced by his own choice and pride to be in the pigpen. He knows that soon he must make a decision. If he doesn't act, he knows that he will die. He says, "I perish with hunger."

This is a position that few in life get to. Not many realize that their own sinful decisions lead to death. The Bible says that our sin eventually leads to death. In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Romans 5:12 speaks of that same instance when it says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." James 1:15 says "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Probably one of the best known verses that talk about the deadly consequences of sin is the first part of Romans 6:23, which says "For the wages of sin is death."

God can see everything that happens on this Earth, and the Bible says that your actions are being recorded. One day God will open all of the books and God Himself will reward you for what you have done. John 5:29 says "[They] shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Those whose lives have any sin in them, even one instance, will be punished with everlasting punishment in the place the Bible calls Hell. But those who have a pure record of no sin will be able to enter into heaven. "That's impossible!" you say. "How can anyone have a pure record? You

just said that everyone has sinned.” That’s true. Keep listening, and I will tell you who gets into heaven and how.

This young man hatches a plan. This is the only plan that will work. He says in verses 18-19 “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” This young man decides that he will go back to his father. His plan is fourfold: Step 1 is that he will arise. He will take action to go back to his father instead of waiting for someone to come and help him. Remember, it says in verse 16 that he was waiting for someone to come and give something to him. Step 2 is that he will confess to his father. We talked about confession some months ago. Confession is when you agree with someone about something, usually about the sinful way in which you acted.

This young man plans to go to his father and confess that he has sinned first of all against God. The Bible says “heaven,” but this was a way that Jews at the time talked about God. This man had first of all sinned against God. You see, every wicked sin you commit is first and foremost a sin against Almighty God. You may wrong someone else in doing it, but you have first offended a Holy God. David felt this when he wrote in Psalms 51:4 “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” The first step in confession is to admit that you have offended God.

But he also says, “I have sinned before thee.” He admits that he has wronged his father. He has disgraced him in front of family and neighbors. He showed no respect for the man who had raised and loved him. He had essentially stolen the fruit from an old man who had worked his whole life for what he had. Often when you do wrong, you do offend other people. It is a good idea to go and reconcile with that person. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24 “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

Step 3 in his plan is to admit his unworthiness. He has not acted as a civil person, let alone a son and heir of the family fortune. He has abdicated his position as son, and so is no longer worthy to be called one. He has no right to any kind of favor from his father, and he will admit this. Step 4 in the younger son’s plan is to beg his father for a job. He will take his place among those who get their living from the man. He will condescend to a place over once he ruled. This takes great humility, and the younger son recognizes that he must now beg for a position that he once wouldn’t have taken for anything.

With this plan in mind, the young man sets off to see his father. Verse 20 starts, “And he arose, and came to his father.” Now the interesting point is this: this story did not originate with Jesus. This story was a story told by rabbis for many years before Jesus taught it. But in the original story, this is what happened. The son would run away, squander everything, and then come back home. The father would be sitting in the house when the son came back and asked for forgiveness. The father would then announce, “I have no son. My son is dead,” and turn his face away. The townspeople would then commend the father for doing the righteous thing in thus punishing his son for this disgrace. That was the prevailing story. But Jesus changes it. He says this at the end of verse 20: “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

This father is not waiting in the house to denounce his son. He has been looking for him. As soon as he sees his son a great way off, the father reacts. Perhaps he is waiting at the edge of town, wanting to protect him in case the townspeople want to take their revenge on behalf of the father. Perhaps he wants his son to know how he feels. Whatever the reason, the father is waiting, watching for him, and when he sees him a great way off, the father reacts in compassion. Jesus says that this father ran to the younger son, which is something older men did not do in that culture. It was considered unrefined to run, but this father runs. When the father gets to his son,

the Bible says that he falls on his neck and kisses him. The father is glad to see his son, and shows it with hugs and kisses.

The son then begins his spiel. He says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He is still willing to be a servant to his father, despite seeing his father's affection. But the father will have none of it. Before the son can finish his speech, the father turns to his servants and commands: "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:" The father calls for a feast in honor of his son. He calls for a robe to be put on his shoulders. In fact, he calls for the best robe. He calls for a ring to be put on his finger, which shows a restoration of his position as the son of a rich man. He calls for shoes to be put on his feet, which is a sign that this son should no longer be thought of as poor. He finally calls for the calf to be killed. There was a calf that had been intentionally fattened for a special occasion, and now he had one.

The father makes one final important statement: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." At that statement, they began the party. This man announces that his son had been dead, but now was alive. He has been lost, but now had been found. There is no condemnation, no rebuke. There is only restoration and love. It as if he has done nothing wrong. The father treats the younger son as if he hadn't insulted him and wasted his money. He treats him as if he had stayed at home the entire time. He expresses relief in the return of his son.

I said earlier that the only people who will enter heaven are those who have done no sin. But this is impossible, since we have all sinned. Heaven will be empty, if no sinners are allowed. Yet the Bible talks about a way to get to heaven, so there must be a way. It is true that guilty people will not enter into heaven. Revelation 21:8 says "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." We are all in danger of eternal punishment. How can we escape this?

The key is found in 1 John 1:9, which says "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Remember, to confess is to agree with God about your sins. That verse says that if you will agree with God that you have sinned, he will forgive you. He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. God promises that, if you ask, He will wipe your record clean of all of it's sins. No church, no ceremony, no religious exercise. You agree with God and ask for His forgiveness, and you'll have it. "So," you say, "All I have to do is tell God I am sorry?" Friend, saying the words, "I'm sorry" to God won't get you forgiveness. No prayer can save you, if you don't believe in your heart that God can save you or that you need saving. Romans 10:9-10 say "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

But on what basis can God just forgive your sins? Doesn't He have to punish them? It's true that your sins must be punished. But that does not mean that you yourself must be punished for them. Remember I quoted Romans 6:23 at the beginning of this broadcast? The second part of the verse says this: "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." God can forgive your sins because of Jesus Christ, and His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. Colossians 1:14 says that in Christ "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." 1 John 1:7 says "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Because of Jesus, who was sinless, perfect, and holy being punished for your sins, you can have His righteousness. You can have the perfection and the holiness of Jesus. You can have the pure record of Christ. Therefore, when God looks at you, He sees a perfect person.

Now, this does not mean that as a Christian, you will never ever sin again. We still have a sin nature with which to contend, but it does mean that your sins are forgiven in the eyes of God. If you will accept God's free gift of salvation, you can have eternal life with God in heaven when you die.

But, you may be asking, “Does God really care about me?” Friend, this whole story of the Prodigal Son is about how much God loves sinners. Remember that Luke 15 tells three stories. At the end of the first story is verse 7, which says, “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” The end of the second story is verse 10, which says, “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” This third story illustrates how God feels when sinners come to Him for forgiveness. God wants to be reconciled with you, like a father would with his child. He tells you that when a sinner comes to God, there is rejoicing in heaven.

This story was told because of some religious leaders who didn’t like that Jesus was offering salvation to people who they deemed less worthy. If you continue reading the story, you see these people characterized by the older brother, the one who stayed behind with his father. There are some people who don’t feel as though others should have salvation. They are too poor, too wicked, too simple, or not like us in some other way. But God says that what He wants is for everyone to come back to Him, no matter who they are. 2 Peter 3:9 says, that God “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

I don’t know why you feel as though you can’t have God’s forgiveness. Maybe you think that you have done too many bad things, or that the things you have done are beyond forgiveness. Maybe you feel like no one else has ever loved you before, and so you doubt that God does. The Bible is sometimes referred to as God’s love letter to you. He says in one of the most famous verses in Scripture, John 3:16, this: “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.” You can just as well put your own name in that verse and know that God loves you. God said this in Romans 5:8: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” 1 John 4:9-10 say this: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

God’s love is available to you, if you will agree that you are an undeserving sinner and accept His free gift, based on what Jesus did for you on the cross. Will you accept Him today? If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at church@fbcpr.org. That’s CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is www.fbcpr.org. If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. I would like to invite any men to join us this Thursday morning at 8:30 for a Bible study through the life of Samson. We will meet at First Baptist Church. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, Minnesota.