

In last week's study, we made a case for understanding that the word prodigal actually means profuse, lavish, luxuriant, or abundant. As such, in the parable of the prodigal son, we might better or at least equally apply the term to the behavior and character of the father toward his sons, as much as the wayward younger brother.

Make no mistake, the younger son was certainly the target of the story, but there was also instruction about God as the father figure, and in the end, those who are represented by the elder son. Let's begin to look this week at the brothers. Read again the opening of the story with an intentional look at the behavior of the sons.

Luke 15:11-24

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and

before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

Two lost sons

It is natural for us, primarily because of how we've been told and taught this story to focus on the wayward son, perhaps for just reasons. However, note carefully that the story begins with the statements: **"There was a man who had two sons."** If Jesus had not intended to include teaching on the two sons, he could have said, "A man said to his father..." Further, he also includes, **"And he divided his property between them."** He would have said that the father gave the man his share of an inheritance. Without question, *both* brothers are to be in view in this story. More than that, "They both have needs and are lost, but they are lost in different ways." (Young, p130) "The story, then, is the story of a loving father who had two boys, one of whom walled himself off from his father's love by doing evil, while the other walled himself off from that same love by doing good...In both cases the sons were prodigals, for they were estranged from their father, and the love relationship between them and him was broken." (Weatherhead, p87)

Outlandish rebellion

When the story begins with the division of inheritance, it is helpful to know that Jewish law provided for a father to give his inheritance before death while retaining the right to its usage until death. What's important to know is that it was the father who should choose to do that for his own reasons – perhaps because of some malady that he knew would claim his life at some point in the not-so-distant future. In this story, the request of the son to a healthy dad was essentially saying, "I wish you were dead - Give me my inheritance!" To the listening

audience it was an outlandish request and the ultimate insult and rebellion.

We should remember at least two things about this devastating attitude and behavior when reading about the father's compliance with the request. First is that the father divided the property between the sons, but the son must liquidate his real property since there were few who had monetary assets in that day. Imagine the pain of the father as the son went about his business of selling off the fruits of his father's lifelong labors. What broken heartedness and extreme patience as he watched his sons rebelliousness. The son was callous toward his father, took everything and moved as far away as he could!

Inasmuch as the father represents God and the son represents the sinfulness of the wayward, it is hard to imagine anything one could do to more deeply violate the relationship through sin. It ought to move us to remember the violation that our sin is for a Father who loves His children with an everlasting love! We ought to abhor our disobedience because it is a loss of fellowship.

The second thing at the beginning of the story is the willingness for the elder brother to stand passively by and let it all happen and not intervene! To the Jewish audience that day, it was nearly as shocking as the younger sons request. Family unity, loyalty, and fidelity was an expression of the heart of God Himself. While there are examples of the failure to maintain this value throughout Scripture, it is stated here because of its violation of the norm. For the elder brother to let it happen and to accept his inheritance himself, was to reveal that he had the wrong attitude toward the father also. The father was nothing more than a banker and his brother nothing more than an obstacle in his path. No brother, no problems or distractions. Problem people are well, just that, a problem, and who has time for problems when one is setting about accomplishing other good things? Leaders who find people they are responsible for as tools to use instead of the point of their leadership, do not lead long or else do not leave a lasting legacy of good. The elder brother forsook the best things for the lesser things. Jesus once said it to the righteous this way, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and**

have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” **“Matthew 23:23** If people become the stumbling block to our goals, perhaps our goals are not aligned with the heart of God!

Returning to the younger brother in the distant land, he enjoyed money that he did not earn and did not value, and quickly found it fleeting. Life has a way of blowing the winds of adversity one's way at the least desired moment. A famine added to the speed of loss and caused him to be reduced to seeking mercy from a non-Jew. Finding no mercy, the pods (from the carob tree) for the pigs becomes the food he eats. It was widely recognized by the rabbi's as that which the poor eat as a consequence of their disobedience. The listeners that day would have connected that the boy's repentance was a result of his poverty.

When he “came to himself,” he suddenly saw clearly the distance he was in – far from home and far from father. His repentance is substantial – he had sinned against “heaven,” a synonym for God, and his earthly father. Before his father ever saw him, he saw his own sin, and the response of his father was no longer the greatest issue. He knew his father as someone who honored God and would surely regard a humble man. He was right in his assessment, but it turned out better that he could have imagined. A signet ring was placed on his hand indicating he was not a hired servant but a member of the family, able to act as an agent of the head of the household. Making matters right with his father was coming full circle. The relationship with the father was what was at issue. He was home and both he and his father were happy once again. The lesson we should take away from the story of a wayward son is that God's heart breaks at our sin and rebellion, but that sadness is never greater than His grace to forgive and restore!

Next Bible Study will be: February 21, 2022

Topic: Storytime with Jesus

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 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.” Luke 15:25-32

desired that. Who do you identify with and why? It’s not too late to return to the Father. He’s waiting. Come and rest in Him. He’s left the light on for you...

The pronouns the elder son uses tell the story about his heart. He does everything right as it were, on the outside, but he has used his father as a means to his own ends and does not realize all that he has sacrificed in terms of relationship. For those who claim to be Christian or followers of Christ, it is so easy to assume the relationship, but to ignore true intimacy with the Heavenly Father. It’s relational fellowship and closeness that the Father covets from His children. Usually those who use their religion for activity rather than relationship are the last to know what they are sacrificing.

In the context of the chapter and Jesus three parables in a row on lost things, we should not forget that Jesus was teaching on what was lost in the story of the Prodigal. Two were lost – without relationship of any meaningful substance with their father. The people listening were supposed to identify with one or the other. Many people there no doubt, did not. Above all, the largest part of the crowd present were identified with the potential to be like the elder brother. Jesus did not accuse, but He did leave the door open for reflection. He expected that. He

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