

**March 14, 2004**

**The Parable Of The Prodigal Son  
Luke 15:11-32**

Introduction:

- A. A true story that relives the ancient story of the Prodigal Son.
  - B. This beautiful story we have traditionally called the “parable to the Prodigal Son” is actually much more than that.
    - 1. It reflects the needs of Jesus’ audience. On the one hand were the sinners and tax collectors who had been ‘written off’ by the Jewish religious elite.
    - 2. On the other side were the Pharisees and teachers of the Law who were smug in their self-righteousness and harshly judged anyone who disagreed with their religious views.
  - C. In order to help both groups of people Jesus told the three parables in Luke 15. They really constitute one parable showing how people become lost in sin.
    - 1. First, the parable of the lost sheep pictures one who is lost because of the carelessness of oneself, by wandering from the fold. Vs. 3-7
    - 2. Second, the parable of the lost coin pictures one who is lost because of the carelessness of others. Vs. 8-10
    - 3. Third, the parable of the lost son pictures one who is lost because of deliberate and outright rebellion and disobedience. Vs. 11-32
    - 4. Fourth, the elder brother of the prodigal pictures one who is lost because of a sinful and selfish disposition.
    - 5. Each of these demonstrates most vividly the huge, forgiving, and loving heart of Almighty God, who is willing and deeply desirous to forgive all who will repent and turn to Him.
  - D. Indeed, the parable of the prodigal son is universally loved and tremendously thought provoking and deeply moving to those who take seriously its many principles and who imbibe its hope.
    - 1. The prodigal son learned many things—often shocking things—the hard way.
    - 2. It is much better to learn from the bitter, disastrous mistakes and sins of others rather than to experience them ourselves. The “school of hard knocks” is often a severe teacher.
  - E. I want to approach this lesson on the basis of the surprises experienced by the prodigal.
- I. The Prodigal Son Must Have Been Deeply Surprised How Easy It Was To Leave Home and His Father. Vv. 11-13
- A. We are surprised that he would desire to leave home with all of his advantages.
    - 1. But the younger of the two sons made the demand to have his share of the inheritance.
    - 2. The first born son possessed the right to a double inheritance, and he was to maintain the females of the family.

3. In this case the younger received one third of the inheritance.
- B. The father could not refuse his son's request, and that must have surprised the young man.
    1. Human beings are created in God's image and that includes free moral agency. God cannot violate man's free moral agency or the right to choose.
    2. Note a couple of passages:  
Josh. 24:15 Luke 6:46
  - C. The father did the only thing he could do. "he divided unto them his living."
    1. The sacred text does not record the pleadings or warnings the father set forth.
    2. This may suggest how easy it is for one's love to grow cold and for one to depart from the faith.
    3. But the prodigal is selfish: it matters little to him/her whether they break the heart of their parents or the heart of God. Jer. 2:13
- II. The Prodigal Son Must Have Been Surprised How Easy It Was To Drift Away From His Father.
- A. It has been said that the child of God who returns to sin does not do so all of a sudden, but over time. Heb. 2:1
  - B. When does the Christian's love grow cold, and he/she apostatizes?
    1. It is when the child of God no longer hungers and thrills to hear the Gospel message.
    2. It is when one's giving is begrudged.
    3. It is when it gets increasingly hard to get up in time for Bible study on Sunday morning, or to return on Sunday and Wednesday nights.
  - C. Drifting is a serious matter and often surprises one when his/her love has grown cold.
- III. The Prodigal Must Have Been Surprised How Many Dangers Were Lurking For Him When He Refused To Listen To His Father.
- A. The prodigal was soon living it up in the fleshpots of the Middle East as he plunged into the dingy world of gambling dives, wine, women and song.
    1. When the prodigal refused to listen to his father, he gave heed to the voices of the world. I Jno. 2:15-17
    2. He was easily deceived because of the pleasures of sin. However, the payday comes.
  - B. When one thinks he/she knows more than their Christian parents and more than the all-wise God of heaven and earth one is laying down a pattern for disaster.

- IV. The Prodigal Must Have Been Surprised How Quickly He Lost All That He Was and Had. Vv. 13-15
- A. Please notice that he was now in a “far” country: far from his father, far from others who loved him, far from loving restraints.
    - 1. He now had his “freedom” and he could now sow his wild oats;
    - 2. His companions were worldly and lustful and wicked: there was no honoring of the sacred and the moral, no affection for the divine and sublime.
  - B. Now, free from all constraints, he spends his inheritance like there was no tomorrow.
    - 1. He was sowing to the flesh and fulfilling the lust of the flesh and the flesh had become his master.
    - 2. Note some passages: Col. 1:21; Rom. 8:13; Prov. 14:12
  - C. He had lost everything:
    - 1. Lost the fellowship of his father.
    - 2. Lost his self-respect.
    - 3. Lost his inheritance.
  - D. His spiritual and financial poverty and ruin came quickly. He was now a physical and spiritual degenerate. He had greatly underestimate the cruelty of the Devil’s realm.
- V. The Prodigal Son Must Have Been Surprised When He Was Totally Abandoned By His Friends, and No One Came To His Assistance.
- A. In the far country, one has friends only as long as his money holds out and as long as he can show them a good time.  
  
“Notice that no man gave unto him” v. 16
  - B. While he was “riding high” it never entered his mind that he would be utterly penniless, destroyed, and helpless one day.
    - 1. The same selfishness and pleasure-mad mania that characterized him when leaving his father would characterize all his temporary worldly companions.
    - 2. When God’s people bow to serving Satan, it results in deep humiliation and will destroy one’s eternal soul in hell. Rom. 6:23.
- VI. The Prodigal Son Was Surprised That His Father Received Him Back. Vv. 17-24
- A. There were two things the prodigal could do while “flat on his back” in the insanity of sin and degradation.
    - 1. He could continue in rebellion, transgression, and abject misery leading to starvation and death, or
    - 2. He could humble himself and return to his right mind.

- B. The son had been telling himself lies since he left home: He had been telling himself that:
1. Life is composed of “give me, give me.”
  2. Things were his most valuable possessions.
  3. He knew more than his father.
  4. Life is to be lived in selfishness.
  5. and that the rules of home are old-fashioned and keep one from enjoying life.
- C. Notice the evidence that the prodigal was able to repent in his terrible state:
1. He was so disillusioned in sin that he had to “come to his senses” in order to repent.
  2. He was able to realize that his present state in sin was worse than his former life at home.
  3. He decided to change, to humble himself.
  4. He admitted his unworthiness and swallowed his pride.
  5. He resolved as the Psalmist: Psa. 119:59-60
- D. Would his father receive him back??? He did not know but he determined to throw himself upon the mercy of his father and request humbly to be treated as a “hired servant.”
- E. The son began his confession but was not allowed by the father to finish it; he had higher, loftier gifts for the prodigal than he could imagine. Consider the ways that the father exemplified God’s total acceptance of repentant sinners:
1. Didn’t wait, but ran to meet his son.
  2. Threw his arms around him and kissed him.
  3. Cut short his son’s confession.
  4. Brought out the best robe, guest of honor.
  5. Put a ring on his finger.
  6. Gave him sandals worn by free people.
  7. Served the fattened calf for a village wide feast.
  8. Considered his son dead and lost, but now alive.

Conclusion:

- A. The lessons for us from this parable include the following:
1. A child of God can apostatize.
  2. Love demands that we seek to do all within our power to restore the prodigal.
  3. When they return, love moves “quickly” to rejoice with them and provide for them.