

The Parables of Jesus #32
The Parable of the Lost Son - 4
Lessons from the Father
(Lk. 15:11-32)
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INTRODUCTION

A. We've been looking at the parable of the prodigal son

1. Actually a mini-series within our series on the parables of Jesus
2. In context, the story was told as an answer by Jesus to the criticism by the Pharisees and scribes
3. But it is a story full of insight and lessons

B. Tonight we focus our attention on the father in the story

1. It should be rather easy to see that this earthly father represents God himself
2. His joy at the return of his son is meant to express to us in human terms, the joy felt by our divine Father when sinners return to him
3. The entire story is meant to tell us something about the heart and mind of God regarding his human children
4. The scribes and Pharisees had missed this understanding, and thus misunderstood Jesus and his ministry

C. There are some fundamental lessons we can learn here about God

1. These are vital to our understanding of the person of God
2. They help us understand what God does for us and how he feels about us
3. If we were more sure about these things, it could make a great difference in our willingness to seek God and return to him

I. WE LEARN BASICS ABOUT MAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A. The story about the young son is very much the story of all mankind

1. In the story, the father provides two essentials to his son
 - a. freedom of choice
 - b. possessions (here in the form of inheritance)
2. Isn't this exactly what we see God doing for man since his creation?
 - a. we say that God created man as a "free moral agent"
 - 1) God created us with the ability and freedom to make our own decisions and choices
 - 2) God may have a will for our lives, but he does not impose that will on us without our involvement
 - 3) God has given us a mind with which we think
 - 4) God gave us a will by which we determine the course of our own lives
 - 5) God gave us emotions with which we either enjoy or do not enjoy the results or consequences of our choices
 - 6) God gave us a conscience which either validates or condemns the decisions or choices we make
 - b. God provided us with all the benefits of creation
 - 1) Genesis teaches us that God gave dominion over all creation to man
 - 2) thus he equipped us with possessions to enrich our lives
3. Just as the young son squandered his inheritance by the destructive choices he made, so man in general wastes God's blessings by his sinful choices

B. The young son's fall is an appropriate picture of the fall of every man

1. He made the decision to leave the father
2. He was responsible for his choices

C. But we learn a great truth about the father

1. The very nature of his relationship with his son is based on the fact that he recognized the son's freedom to make his own way
2. The father gave him life, but it was on the son's shoulders, the kind of life he made for himself

II. THE SON WAS UNFAITHFUL, BUT THE FATHER WAS FAITHFUL

A. In the story, it was the son who left home

1. He abandoned his father and wasted his inheritance
2. He abandoned his moral training and shamed his family
3. He abandoned his identity and lost his self-respect

B. But the father remained just as he had always been

1. In the son's troubled times, he knew right where his father was
2. Even though the son renounced his father, the father still looked for his son to return
3. When the son thought he might find a place in his father's household as a servant, the father received him as a son

C. This reminds us of the fact that the Bible teaches that God is faithful

1. Deut 7:9
Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; (NKJ)
2. 1 Cor 1:9
God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (NKJ)

D. Because God is faithful, we are secure in the fact that he is always there

III. WE SEE THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR HIS SON

A. Perhaps we do no damage to the text to read between the lines a bit

1. Do you think the father in the story was happy with his son's decision?
2. Do you think he was happy the day his son left home?
3. Do you think he was pleased upon hearing the kind of life he was living?
4. Do you think he had any spark of joy when he thought of this son?
5. Look closely at Lk. 15:20, 22-23
 - a. this father was waiting anxiously, expectantly for him to return
 - b. his heart was not filled with condemnation, reproof, or even an "I told you so"
 - c. what we see is a father who loved his son and rejoiced to have him home again

B. This reminds us of all the verses telling us of God's love for man

1. Deut 7:9
Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; (NKJ)
2. 1 Cor 1:9
God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (NKJ)
3. John 3:16
For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJ)
4. Rom 5:8
But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (NKJ)
5. II Th 2:16-17
Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. (NKJ)
6. I Jn 3:1
Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (NKJ)

C. There's an important point to be made here

1. If you really understood and believed that God thoroughly loved you, would it really be hard to return to him when life falls apart?
2. We need to ask ourselves what motivated the son to return to his father -- even though his knowledge was imperfect, he knew something about his father that made returning possible

IV. THE STORY TELL US ABOUT THE HEART OF THE FATHER

A. Scribes and Pharisees completely misunderstood the heart of God

1. They worked to separate themselves from the sinners and the tax collectors
2. They saw their sin and wanted nothing to do with them

B. Jesus knew the heart of God

1. He worked to be with sinners and tax collectors
2. He saw their sin and wanted to win them back for the Father

C. Here again are basic things to understand

1. Matt 9:11-13

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (NKJ)

2. 1 Tim 1:15

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (NKJ)

CONCLUSION

A. Here is something we don't often discuss -- who is the central character in the story of the prodigal son?

1. Is it really the young son who squanders his inheritance?
2. Is it the older son who misunderstood his father's joy?
3. I suggest the central character in the story is the father
 - a. it is his heart that makes the story possible
 - b. it is his faithfulness that allows his son to return home
 - c. it is his representation of God that chastises the scribes and Pharisees

B. It's time we start thinking about what kind of heavenly Father we have

1. Would it matter to you what God is like?
2. Would you return to this kind of father?

C. Invitation