

The Two Lost Sons.

Text: Luke 15:11-32

Suggested Hymns:

326, 356, 303, 315, 329

1) A Brief Overview Of The Text

2) The Prodigal Son

3) The Elder Brother

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 15:11-32, 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 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 pods that the swine 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 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.*

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.’” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is perhaps one of the most beautiful of all Christ’s parables. It is found only in the Gospel of Luke. It is one of the longer parables, but not a word is wasted. Often it is treated only partially. It is wonderfully rich and therefore some people ignore the finer points. But it is only when the two brothers are set up for comparison with each other, that we can obtain the best and fullest lessons. Let us therefore consider the two lost sons. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A Brief Overview Of The Text

The traditional title for this parable is “*The prodigal son.*” Yet the central figure in this parable is not the son but the father. It has been suggested that a better title might be “*The parable of the father’s love.*”

The action of this father is so out of the ordinary. Here is a father more than human. The son speaks of having “*sinned against heaven and before you,*” distinguishing his earthly father from the heavenly Father.

The portrayal of this son evokes negative feelings. He is recklessly wasteful. He can’t wait until his father dies to get his share of the property, which he immediately converts to cash. He does not remain at home to care for his ageing

father but goes to a country far off where he lives among Gentiles. There he squanders his money in wild living. The older brother adds the detail that the money was spent with prostitutes.

The time comes, however, when the money is gone; famine grips the land, and the prodigal son is forced to work on a pig farm caring for unclean animals. The pigs ate pods from the carob tree. This tree is found all over the Mediterranean area. Its long pods contain a sweet pulp and indigestible seeds, and they were used as food for animals, and sometimes even for humans.

The prodigal son has plenty of time to think as he toils at his dirty job. He compares his condition to the far better status enjoyed by the hired servants of his father. He resolves to go back to his father, confess his sin, admit his unworthiness as a son, and beg to work as a hired hand.

But even before he is able to make his confession, the waiting father spots his returning son on the road. He runs to his son and welcomes him with hugs and kisses. He loves the sinner even before that sinner makes his statement of repentance.

He orders the best robe, a ring and sandals, and a feast. The fatted calf kept for special occasions is killed. The celebration begins at once. The dead son lives — the lost has been found.

The excesses of the prodigal son are matched by the excesses of the loving father. What the father does is amazing. He runs to meet his wayward son. He does not put him on probation or lecture him for his sins. He is bountiful in the welcome he gives to his son. These are not the normal actions of a human father. Here is a portrayal of divine joy over a repenting sinner.

This joy is not at all shared by the older brother. We may feel a bit negative toward him, but we can surely understand why he might be upset. On returning from the field where he has been labouring faithfully in his father's service, he hears music and dancing. When the older brother hears the reason for this expensive party, he refused to enter the house. He stands outside fuming.

The loving father again comes into the picture. He pleads for his older son to take part in the joyful celebration. What the father hears is criticism of his love. The older son reminds his father of the years of dutiful service he has rendered.

But his virtue was not rewarded even with a young goat for a fun time with his friends. Yet the vice of *“this son of yours”* (the older son does not even call him “brother”) is forgotten and a fatted calf is killed in his honour. There seems to be every reason for this older son’s bitterness.

One cannot fail to see Jesus here drawing a portrait of the Pharisees and experts in the law. They were proud of the dutiful way in which they observed all of God’s commands. They felt fully justified in criticising Jesus for His fellowship with sinners and tax collectors. And they were certainly not about to join in joyfully celebrating the repentance of a sinner.

The parable ends with one last attempt on the father’s part to explain his actions. He speaks of the prodigal son as *“your brother”* and repeats the reason for celebrating. Jesus does not tell us whether or not the older son was persuaded. The parable is open ended, inviting the listener to respond — do we participate in the joy?

This has been judged by some people to be the greatest of Jesus’ parables. Who can fail to be moved by the boundless love and joy of this father who welcomes back his lost son? Such is the nature of our heavenly Father, as demonstrated by His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

2. The Two Lost Sons

A Closer Look At The Prodigal Son

In considering the prodigal son we first look at His **descending** way of sin and destruction.

There was pride. Pride is the mother of many sins. It cost Satan heaven. It cost our first parents, Paradise. Pride is the cause of most of trouble the in the Church. Schisms. Heresies. In the hymn, *“Lead, Kindly Light,”* the hymnist John Newman wrote *“Pride ruled my will.”*

Then there was also wandering. The younger son was not satisfied to remain at home under his father’s eye. This is a type or illustration of the entire human race in this respect. People have a desire for false freedom. But how terribly mistaken! Many people do not understand Christ’s words, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.”*¹

This young son tasted all possible fleshly delights. Our text tells us that he *devoured [his] livelihood with harlots,*² and *wasted his possessions with prodigal living.*³ Prodigal means reckless, wasteful, lavish, and extravagant.

This led to Servile bondage. He became a servant of his prodigal living. Sowing to the flesh reaps a terrible harvest. We are punished not so much for our sins as than by the sins themselves. This resulted in his lowest degradation. Feeding pigs. Pigs are an abomination to a Jew, because they regard pigs as unclean animals.

Things became so bad that *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 pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*

There was no food. He had to steal the swines’ food. This is a true picture of a sinner in later stages of sin. In this way Satan seduces people. He promises pleasure and glory, but it actually results in final ruin.

The final point to note in his decline was his wretchedness. Now the younger son was tasting the bitter fruit of his sin. They are like the Apples of Sodom. All human wretchedness and misery are the fruit of sin.

Now let us consider the ascending way of redemption of the prodigal son.

We first note humility. Humility is the opposite of pride. Our text says that he *“came to himself.”* He realised what his pride and waywardness had brought him. Now sin has lost its attractions. He sees the good life in his father’s house, not with the glamour of Satan’s promises, as he had lusted for sinful enjoyment, but he now sees it with the eyes of truth.

Next we note that he is determined to return. He does not stop with thoughts of repentance, but puts his resolve into action. In dead earnest. The change of conversion must go as deep as the previous service of sin.

Next comes freedom. The prodigal son is received by his father, not as one of his hired servants, but as *“my son.”* He is restored to all he had lost and forfeited. Now he experiences true freedom, not the false freedom of service to sin.

Now he truly does have life. He takes up his life at home, where he had laid it down. But here we must also think of the spiritual meaning of the parable. This earthly story is but a poor, and faint picture of Eternal life with its joys and bliss. Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 2:9, ⁹ *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

2. The Two Lost Sons

A Closer Look At The Elder Brother

Firstly we note, how much better the older son appears than the younger brother!

The younger brother forsook his father, but he remains. However, he has a self-righteous spirit. He regarded himself better than his younger brother. This is also pride, but this is pride of a different type. Nevertheless, it is just as destructive and sinful as that of the younger brother.

The younger brother squandered the father's goods, but the older son looked after his father's goods, administered and increased them. However, he did this with an eye to future possession, not from love to the father. The older brother was angry when his younger brother returned because it might mean a decrease of his inheritance.

The younger brother sought the company of harlots, but the older brother is content to be with his friends, even though a young goat was never killed for him *that [he] might make merry with [his] friends*.

But his friends were no doubt the same self-righteous type as he. The older son was actually dissatisfied with his father's treatment. Everything gave him an opportunity to complain.

The younger brother comes now even from the swine, but the older brother from the field. He considers his brother permanently disgraced. How much better than the younger son, is the older son who has continued industrious and hard-working! This attitude is closely related in spirit to the Pharisee in the Temple.

The second major point regarding the older son is how wretchedly lost he is!

He serves his father with a selfish, not with a child-like mind. His conduct is guided not by an impulsive heart, but by a cold mind. Christ says in Matthew 21:31-32,³¹ *“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.*

³² “For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

The older son has enjoyed the father’s love, but complains of having received no reward. This shows his lack of dutiful love. Was his complaint justified? Certainly not! The character of father denies it.

The older son asserts that he has never transgressed a commandment, but yet has never truly fulfilled one. True obedience comes from the heart. His heart was not right with his father.

The older son boasts of his virtue, and even as he does so, his transgression has increased. Some sins are especially active in separating us from God. The sin of self-righteousness is one of them.

This is a very instructive parable. It is a beautiful and true picture of how the sinner by repentance and faith returns to God.

But it is also a sad picture of the self-righteous person, who so utterly fails to comprehend the real meaning of sin and redemption.

Let us be warned lest we fall into the same error as the elder brother. Let us, when sin overwhelms us, take courage from the example of the younger brother to return to the loving heavenly Father’s heart.

We need not despair for we shall always find love and forgiveness there. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 11:29

² V 30

³ V 30