

The Parable of the Radical Father

Luke 15:11-32

(preached Pine Grove 5/31/20 Sun PM)

Introduction

Luke 15:11-32 is often called the parable of the prodigal son.

The word prodigal describes someone who is wasteful of money.

Someone who lives a lavish lifestyle.

And that adjective clearly describes one of the sons in this parable.

Furthermore, many people read this parable and see their own child in it.

A child who rejects his upbringing and sets out to live his own lavish lifestyle away from his parents, but then returns home.

And certainly that is a truth that is found in this parable, but that is not the focus of Luke 15:11-32.

The focus of Luke 15:11-32 is not the prodigal son but the radical father.

A father who breaks all sorts of rules of normal behavior in his day.

And he does it not once but many times in this parable.

Now, just to set this parable up, Luke 15 is a chapter that contains 3 parables of Jesus.

Remember, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

And in Luke 15, we get 3 rapid fire parables from Jesus.

The first parable is concerned with a lost sheep, the second concerns a lost coin, and the third concerns a lost son.

The first two parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin are fairly short, but the final parable of the lost son is longest parable that Jesus ever told.

Now why are these parables found here in Luke 15?

Simply put, the Pharisees were fed up with Jesus hanging out with sinners and tax collectors.

Look at Luke 15:1.

1 Now all the tax collectors and the [a]sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

There were many things that the Jewish religious leaders despised about Jesus, but what really set them off was Jesus’ concern for the sinners of their society.

Jews had no regard for folks living in sin.

They figured they were getting what they deserved, and for a Jewish man to hang with them was unheard of.

But Jesus came for the sick.

He came to save those who society saw as unsavable.

And the parables of Luke 15 reveal that God rejoices over the salvation of one sinner.

The shepherd was filled with joy to find his lost sheep.

The woman was filled with joy to find her lost coin.

And the father was filled with joy to find his lost son.

The Jewish religious leaders thought their good lives brought joy to God, but Jesus is about to teach that a sinner brings joy to God when he repents and comes to Him.

Now, the parable of the lost son needs very little introduction.

First, know the 3 main characters of the story, a father and his two sons.

And then know the setting of the story which would be 1st century Israel.

Now we have a hard time putting ourselves in 1st century Israel but the main thing to know is that family honor was supreme.

Folks didn't travel far and wide as they do now.

In fact, most people were born, lived, and died within the same town.

Your life consisted of taking care of your family by feeding and protecting them and passing on what you could to next generation.

So with that setting in mind, let's just simply follow the action of the parable.

I will give us a little outline to keep us moving along, but the action of the parable is riveting enough.

Let's begin in verses 11-13 with..

I. The Rejection (11-13)

Verses 11.

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.'

Now, this seems like a simple start to the parable, but as the Pharisees around Jesus listened to this parable, their blood would already be rising.

No son, especially, a younger son would ask for their share of the inheritance before the death of the father.

Saying give me my share of the inheritance is to essentially say, "I wish you were dead so I could get my money."

No son would do this to his father, but this is how the parable starts and it was shock the listeners from the first sentence.

But the end of the verse 12 would be more shocking.

So he divided his [d]wealth between them.

If it is true that no son would ask for his inheritance early, it is even more true that no father would honor his request.

But that is exactly what this radical father does.

He divided his wealth between the sons.

Now the share for the younger son would be $1/3$, while the older son received $2/3$.

And since we will later see that the father has servants and hired hands, it is safe to assume that even a $1/3$ of the estate is a sizable amount of money.

Now, we are two verses into the parable, and the Pharisees are already standing around with the mouths of the ground.

The boy should have never asked, but worse the father should have never given his share of the estate.

Instead of a big ol bag of money, the boy needed a good ol slap on the face.

At this point, we begin to see who the characters in the story represent.

The father is God, who gives people freedom to choose their sin.

The younger son is the one who chooses to outwardly rebel.

But the older son is the one who has the appearance of goodness but inwardly rebellious to his father.

In fact, it should be noted that the older son is not even mentioned in the opening verses.

As a older son, he should be there in this conversation.

He should be talking sense to his brother and pleading for him to stay.

But as we are going to see, the older brother has no love for his brother or worse yet, he has no love for his father either.

So the son get the money and he leaves almost immediately.

Verse 13..

13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

At this point, the younger son's rejection of the father is complete.

Not only did he want his share of the inheritance, he used his share of the inheritance in the worst way.

It would have a little more acceptable if he had taken that money and move away to start another estate.

But he dishonored and rejected his father even further by wasting the hard earned resources on sinful living.

This is the sinner.

God blesses him with a body, with health, with money, and the sinner uses all those blessings to do things that stand opposite of the God who gave them to him.

This is full force rejection.

This is insult.

This is the younger son.

But his rejection soon becomes dejection.

Let's move to verse 14-16.

II. The Dejection (14-16)

Verse 14...

14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 So he went and [e]hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the [f]pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

If there is any sense of relief for the listeners to this parable, it occurs in these verses.

In their mind, this disobedient son finally gets what he deserves.

He deserves to starve.

He deserves to eat with pigs, which would be the lowest point for any Jewish boy.

Pork was sense as defiled, and to eat among the pigs would be seen as the lowest form of humiliation imaginable.

But this is where sin takes you.

It takes you from a place where the father is meeting all your needs to a place where you can even meet your own needs.

In fact, you can't even outsmart the pigs out of their own food.

This is rock bottom for the sinner.

It is the edge of death, and it is the natural outcome for those who love their sin more than the God who gave them life.

And for the first time, the Pharisees would feel that this parable was going their way.

The younger son sinned and now he is about to starve to death.

But then something strange happens.

We have seen the reaction and the dejection, but now let's look at the intention.

III. The Intention (17 -19)

Verse 17..

17 But when he came to [g]his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and [h]in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”’

In a nutshell, this is one of the greatest pictures of repentance in all the Bible.

Jesus says that the younger son comes to his senses..

The Greek literally says that he came to himself.

Someone once said that hitting rock bottom either knocks you out or knocks sense into your head.

The younger son found that rock bottom was harder than his own head, and he intends to head home.

Now you see something in verse 17 that is easy to miss.

The son says that his father's hired men had more than enough bread.

Look, an estate would have permanent servants.

They would live on the estate and work and the father would meet all their needs in exchange for their labor.

But there would always be a need for extra help on an estate.

This is where day laborers came in.

These would be men that were hired for a day's work and paid at the end of each day.

They would be the lowest on the economic ladder of society because some days they would work and some days, they wouldn't work.

But please note the even the hired men of the father's estate had more than enough bread.

What does this tell us?

That the father is an extremely generous man.

Even taking care of the lowest in society by providing beyond what they need.

So the son intends to head back to a father known for his generosity.

Surely there is remorse in the son's heart for how he has treated his father.

And his heart is also filled with a desire to make things right.

The son plans to admit his sin against God and his father, and furthermore, the son is willing to work his way back into the father's grace.

He even plans to ask his father to work alongside the day laborer's until he has paid back what he owed.

What does true repentance look like?

There is regret over what you have done.

There is remorse over who you have offended.

There is rejection of your former actions.

And there is a readiness to do whatever it takes to please the Lord.

And before we leave these verses, let me also mention that this would please the Pharisees as well.

The boy sinned, he got what he deserved, and it is good that he wants to make it right.

In their system, he would return and work among the day laborers until every penny of what he wasted was returned to the father.

In their view, he should be ashamed.

HE should return and take his medicine from the village, from the family, and from the father.

And their hope is that Jesus is finally going to teach from this parable how sin can be forgiven through time and effort and hard work.

But now let's move to what we will simply call the celebration.

IV. The Celebration (20-24)

Verse 20..

20 So he got up and came to [i]his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and [j]embraced him and kissed him.

Verse 20 may be most radical verse in any parable Jesus ever told.

This is why this parable should be known as the parable of the radical father instead of the parable of the prodigal son.

What this father did in looking for his boy and running to his boy and embracing and kissing his boy overturned years of Jewish teaching.

First of all, Jewish fathers didn't run to anything.

Dignity was a virtue in Judaism.

On top of that, men wore robes to prevent their legs from being seen.

So to run in a robe and risk showing your legs was bad enough.

But to embrace a disgraced son who smelled like pigs was the height of Jewish no-nos.

Look, funerals were held for Jewish children who left their families.

It was the worst disgrace imaginable.

Everyone in this village would know of the boy's rebellion.

Everyone in the village would glare at the boy as he came back into town.

Everyone in the village wouldn't speak to him until the boy spoke to his father.

The shame of the town would be great.

The shame of the folks on the estate would be greater.

And normally, a child would have to endure all that as they made their way back home.

But the father erases all that shame by running to the boy as first entered town.

And if the Pharisees listening to this parable were hoping for an approved ending, that hope was shattered in this one verse.

But it gets worse for them.

Verse 21.

21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly 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 fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

In a moment, the son is received back into the family and all the privileges of being the father's son are immediately returned.

The robe, the ring, and sandals are all signs of his complete restoration.

They are all symbols of what salvation brings to the sinners.

We become sons of God, adopted as his children.

We are clothed with righteousness of Christ.

This is the radical nature of God's grace.

The son gets what he doesn't deserve, and he gets it immediately and completely without any strings attached.

Without any effort on his part.

He doesn't have to suffer for his sins.

HE doesn't have to make up for his sins.

He doesn't have to work to pay the father back.

He comes the Father in faith and repentance and all is restored and forgiven.

And on top of this, the father celebrates the coming home of the son.

This is a radical father.

Running, embracing, forgiving, restoring, and then celebrating.

No Jewish father would ever do this, and no Jewish Pharisee would ever approve of this.

This boy needed to work.

HE needed to suffer for his sins.

He needed to pay the price and earn his keep and make up for what he did.

In their mind, you can't just welcome in the worst of sinners without making them pay the price.

But guess what?

God does that.

And it gives him great joy to do it.

This celebration and meal is not a celebration of the son, it is a celebration of the father's generosity.

It is a celebration of the father's grace.

It is a celebration of the father's character.

And this celebration happens in heaven every day when God finds a lost sinner and saves them.

This is the point of every parable in Luke 15.

What gives God joy?

To find a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son or daughter.

But every party has a party pooper and we meet him in verses 25-30.

If the father in the parable is God and the younger you is the tax collector, the older son is the Pharisee.

Verse 25.

Let's call this the irritation.

V. The Irritation (25-29)

25 “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

As we already said, the older may have stayed home but he was just as distant from his father as the younger son.

He wasn't around with his father looking for his brother to return.

He may have appeared to love his father by being close to home, but his heart was far away.

So he hears the commotion of the party, and he wants to find out what is going on.

Verse 26.

***26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.
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.’***

What great news.

The father has his son back and the older brother has his younger brother back.

Time to go celebrate, right?

Verse 28..

28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never [k]neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your [l]wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'

So much to see and say here, but let's keep it brief.

Though God rejoices over finding a lost sinner, religious people pout when sinners get saved.

This older son thought he had earned his keep.

HE thought that the father was pleased with his work and effort and loyalty.

But guess what the father knew?

There was no love in his heart for him.

And now that becomes evident.

In a party celebrating the father's forgiveness and grace, the older son's true colors come out.

He is irritated that the father would freely forgive his brother.

And why is he irritated?

Because he thinks he has done everything to please his father, yet the one who has done nothing is getting all the attention.

What's the issue here?

Grace irritates people who think that a person needs to work for their salvation.

Grace irritates people who put their hope in works and rituals and loyalty but have no love for God.

Why the Pharisees irritated with Jesus?

He was telling sinners and tax collectors that heaven's doors were open to them if they would simply believe in Him.

And that was scandalous in the Jewish religious system of good works.

Grace simply fit where people teach a need to place
God with your good deeds.

However, don't miss the continued grace and
generosity of the father.

In verse 28, he pleads with the son to join the party,
and in verses 31-32, he continues the invitation.

VI. The Invitation (31-32)

31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you [m]have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’”

The invasion to the older son is to simply love what the father loves.

The father is overjoyed that his younger son is found and alive.

And if the older son would join in that joy, he would also know experience the same blessing.

Sadly, this is not what happens.

Now, you may ask how do I know that?

How do I know the older son didn't repent of his attitude and come to the party?

Well, if you follow the characters and the flow of history, Jesus welcomes more sinners to heaven, and how do the Pharisees respond?

Do they repent of the jealousy and irritation?

No, they simply kill him.

Though Jesus doesn't end the parable by saying that the older son took a stone from the field and struck his father in the head, that is exactly how it played out.

The Pharisees rage against grace was so great that they killed God in the flesh.

This is the radical nature of works righteousness.

It kills grace.

Conclusion

Now what do heavenly truths do we learn from this earthly parable?

WE have talked about a lot, but let me highlight the main ones.

#1- Sin is unfulfilling.

You will pay a lot to commit the sin of your choice, but sin will never pay you back.

It will promise the world and leave you in a pig pen starving to death.

Ignore the promises of sin, and cling to the promises of God.

#2- Religious people are lost.

Listen to me carefully.

You can be near to God and the family of God physically but be lost spiritually.

The younger son's rejection of his father was obvious.

But the older's son's reaction of his father was concealed.

Be careful not to spend your whole life near God physically but never know his spiritually.

I fear for people in church who roll their eyes and blow their breath and whisper to their friends when someone gets saved in their church who doesn't fit their mold of who is savable.

When the people of God don't share in the joy of God when someone gets found by God, those people don't know God themselves.

#3 - God is gracious.

He is gracious enough to give you enough freedom to live your life as you desire chasing your sin.

And he is gracious enough to welcome you back and never say I told you so and make you earn your way back into his good graces.

This is the radical nature of God.

He is so unlike us, and thank God He is.

May we enjoy his grace, and we take joy in His grace extended to others.