

LUKE 15

Luke 15:11-16

15:11-12 *¹¹Then Jesus said, "A man had two sons. ¹²The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property.' So the father divided his property between his two sons.*

Using another illustration, Jesus added a vital dimension to His explanation of His association with sinners. Jesus spoke of a father who had two sons. The younger of the two asked his father for his share of the inheritance. The father divided his fortune and gave the younger son his share. Unlike the lost sheep and the missing coin of the preceding illustrations, the sons in this parable are not mere possessions. They are their father's children. They are his flesh and blood. They have an indisputable relationship that unavoidably characterizes every interaction of their relationship.

15:13 *"After a few days, the younger son gathered his possessions and left for a country far away from home. There he wasted everything he had on a wild lifestyle.*

No sooner had he received his inheritance than the younger son decided to test life outside of his father's care, provision, and immediate supervision. Money in hand and fortune at his fingertips, the younger son took a trip to a distant country far away from home and his father's influence. There, he exhausted his resources in a debauched lifestyle that completely rejected his upbringing. He lived an unruly life that was guided by his fortune instead of good judgment and sound reasoning.

15:14 *He had nothing left when a severe famine spread throughout that country. He had nothing to live on.*

The consequence of this young man's own irresponsible conduct finally caught up with him. A severe famine covered the land after he had already wasted his inheritance. Because he had exhausted his fortune, he was unable to provide even the basic necessities for himself. Once affluent, the extravagant young man now faced utter destitution. He had nothing to eat.

15:15 *So he got a job from someone in that country and was sent to feed pigs in the fields.*

Once a self-sufficient young magnate, now poverty-stricken, the desperate young man found employment on a pig farm. One of his tasks was to feed the pigs. The young man could never have imagined such a predicament. Raised in a comfortable home, he probably thought that his fortune would never run out. However, his unruly conduct and unbridled extravagance ruthlessly forced him into a state of utter poverty. Displaced from his place of birth and comfort by his own choice and conduct, the young man became a stranger in a land that was not his own and desperately sought to survive by feeding swine. This was unthinkable since the Jews considered pigs to be unclean (*Leviticus 11:7*).

15:16 *No one in the country would give him any food, and he was so hungry that he would have eaten what the pigs were eating.*

Apparently, feeding pigs did not earn the young man sufficient income to sustain himself. He was always hungry, and no one would sympathize with his situation. He was so desperate that he yearned to eat the crumbs that the pigs dropped. Even that was scarce. He was thoroughly humiliated and utterly ruined. Deceived by the temporary promise of money in hand, the young man walked right out of fortune and into utter indigence, wishing he could eat with the pigs.

Notes/Applications

The story of the “prodigal son” is arguably one of the most widely known biblical anecdotes often used to underscore remorse, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. However, the importance of these noble conclusions significantly diminishes the lesson one must learn from the bitter cause that led to the regrettable experience. In explaining His conduct to the Pharisees, Jesus shifted the focus from Himself to the desperate conditions of the lost, which demanded His association with the condemned.

The story of the “prodigal son” however, exposes the depraved inclinations of the people Jesus came to save. Their sin nature thrusts people into the bitter snares of the love of money and the fleeting promises of passing pleasures. Determining his right to his share of his father’s inheritance to be more important than appreciating the privileges of living with his father, the younger son asked for his share of the money. Deceived by the abundance of money and temporal wealth and, consumed by the urges of sinful, rebellious indulgence, the young man wallowed in temporal pleasure with unrestrained extravagance and unchecked discretion.

The “prodigal son” was motivated by a uniquely destructive passion with negative consequences. His selfish impulses, fueled by the love of money and unfounded confidence in his material affluence, drove him. Ultimately he became so impoverished and suffered the

pains of hunger so intensely that he wished he could dine with pigs. Blinded by the love of money, the young man was unable to discern the destructive ways of his lifestyle until it was too late. He was completely obsessed with the promises of his newly found fortune. But he ended up with the pigs.

We should not be too hard on this young man. This is a picture of each one of us—those of us who are sinners and tax collectors. We have wandered away from our heavenly Father. We have tried to move as far away from His influence as we can. Then, without any constraints, we indulge our every fantasy, living on money we don't have, and ending up impoverished. But this isn't simply a picture of our physical circumstances. It is a picture of the depravity of our souls. We know there is a Creator. We know He hates sin. Yet, we choose to avoid Him and embrace sin until it is too late. Then, when our world falls apart, when there are no more illusions, we cry out for help.

Fortunately for us, this is not the end of the story. However, it is an accurate representation of the true condition of our hearts.

Luke 15:17-24

15:17 *“Finally, he came to his senses. He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more food than they can eat, while I’m starving to death here?’*

The young man finally came to his senses, brought on by the bitter experiences of humiliation, destitution, and starvation. The bitter realities of the experience taught him the worthlessness of material wealth and slavery to the flesh. He remembered the good life he had left behind at his father’s house. He thought about the abundance that his father’s household provided for the hired servants. He was forced to face the contradiction induced by his own unruly conduct. He realized that he, the son, was starving while the hired servants lived comfortably in his father’s house. He came to his senses and realized that he alone was responsible for the predicament that had developed.

15:18 *I’ll go at once to my father, and I’ll say to him, “Father, I’ve sinned against heaven and you.”*

The young man finally realized his spiritual condition was the cause of his physical circumstances. He acknowledged his sin. He became fully aware that he had offended both God and his father. He recognized that he had considered his own desires as more important than honoring God Who blessed him and his father who provided for him. The young man had captured a glimpse of the depth and breadth of his transgression toward God and his rebellion against his father. He repented and decided that he would return to his father and seek his forgiveness. He determined that he would confess his sin to his father, admitting that he had also sinned against God. He was heartily sorry of his transgressions and repented of the selfish motives which drove him away from his father and his God.

15:19 *I don’t deserve to be called your son anymore. Make me one of your hired men.”*

The conviction that motivated the young man was truly astounding. He not only acknowledged, confessed, and repented of his sin, but he also judged himself according to the severity of his offense. He planned to admit to his father that he no longer deserved to be treated as a son. He would be content if he could just be one of his father's hired servants.

The young man was well aware that he could not undo his position as a son. However, he could not casually dismiss his sinful conduct and its bitter consequences. He felt ashamed to be called the son of the father he had so incredibly offended. He was so remorseful that he decided he would rather have his father treat him as a hired servant.

15:20 *"So he went at once to his father. While he was still at a distance, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son, put his arms around him, and kissed him.*

Once he repented of his sins and made up his mind to return home, the young man was ready to take action. He started his journey homeward, happy to leave destitution behind. He could not be certain of the outcome, but he hoped to receive mercy and compassion from the father he had offended.

While the son was still quite a distance from his home, his father saw him. The father was filled with compassion and sorrow for his son. Certainly, he had missed him because the son had been gone for a long time, and their parting was not happy. However, the father was deeply moved when he observed the pitiful condition to which his once prosperous son had sunk. Nevertheless, moved even more with fatherly love, the father hurried to meet his son while he was still on the road and received him with hugs and kisses in spite of his offensive physical condition.

15:21 *Then his son said to him, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven and you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore.'*

Perhaps shocked by the warmth with which his father received him, the son immediately began to confess his sin and asked for his father's forgiveness. He told his father that he had sinned against God and against him. He lamented that he no longer deserved to be called his son. The son did not show any inclination of taking his father's compassion for granted. He did not demonstrate a desire to slip back into complacency and selfishness. Because he had experienced the bitter taste of selfishness and rebellion, his remorse was real. His repentance was genuine. Because he profoundly realized that his restoration could come only through genuine forgiveness, he pleaded with his father to forgive him and to hire him as a servant. He just wanted to be safe and secure near the family he once belonged to as a son.

15:22 *"The father said to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring out the best robe, and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.*

Luke does not record the father's response to the remorse his son expressed. Perhaps the son was confessing his sin to his father as they continued toward their home. It is certain the father expressed forgiveness in his instruction to his servants.

The father told his servants to outfit his son with the best robe, a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet. The father not only forgave and accepted his son, but he also celebrated his return by dressing him, not as a hired servant, but as his son.

15:23 *Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let's celebrate with a feast.*

After having his son cleaned up and dressed, the father put on a feast to celebrate the young man's return. He ordered his servants to slaughter the fatted calf so that he could serve choice meat at the party. Indeed, there was unspeakable joy in the father's house at the return of the lost son. The whole household was caught up in the excitement and joy that the son had returned, and the father was once more con-

tent to see his family united again.

15:24 *My son was dead and has come back to life. He was lost but has been found.' Then they began to celebrate.*

The father continued to articulate the circumstances surrounding his son's return home. The son had left home with his share of his father's fortune. He entertained no thought of returning home. The parting was not pleasant. So once the son left home, he was as good as dead and hopelessly lost to the entire family. There was no joy or hope in their relationship when the son left the father.

Seeing his son alive and returning home was not what the father expected. It was a miracle. He quickly replaced the facts of the past with the new reality of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. The son, who was as good as dead, was now alive and well. He had come home seeking reconciliation and restoration. Death and loss were once and for all replaced by life and redemption. The father and his household were celebrating because the dead man was now alive, and the lost was now found.

Notes/Applications

The "prodigal son" was overcome by an overwhelming sense of remorse due to the bitter experience he had. He was faced with the facts about his conduct and the subsequent remembrance of home. However, his remorse became meaningful when he repented, took action to return home, and was received by his father with love and forgiveness. The son did not merely express some vague regret about his humiliating circumstances. He recognized the sin in his life and sought his father's help to deal with it.

The father waited faithfully and patiently, hoping that his son might return home some day. Because he loved his son, he did not hesitate to welcome him as he saw him walking toward him. Not only did he forgive his son, but he also celebrated his return with a joyous feast of choice delicacies. He cleaned him up and dressed him with

attire that suited a son of his stature. With a robe, he covered his shame. With a ring, the father restored him to the position of a son. With the shoes, he protected his son's feet from further injury. The father's forgiveness was extensive and inclusive.

One of the most important aspects of this illustration is the son's admission that he had sinned not only against his father but also against his heavenly Father. The son acknowledged his sin against his heavenly Father first and then against his earthly father. Genuine repentance and the subsequent forgiveness come first from Almighty God and then from our earthly father. Only when we experience the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ can we finally find rest from the dilemma of our sinful existence. Then, bathed in the Lord's forgiveness, the Holy Spirit equips us to make peace with those we have offended.

Luke 15:25-32

15:25-26 ²⁵*“His older son was in the field. As he was coming back to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called to one of the servants and asked what was happening.*

The older brother was working in the field while the celebration for the great reunion was taking place at the house. He heard the sound of music and dancing when he came home at the end of the day. The brother paused outside the home and called one of the servants to ask about the unusual commotion that was going on inside his father’s house.

At the outset, the older brother seemed legitimately puzzled regarding the event about which he was not informed. As far as he knew, the day was over. He had completed his daily duties in the field. At last he could rest from his labors and enjoy some refreshment. Because of the commotion inside his father’s house, he hesitated before entering the house without knowing what was taking place inside.

15:27 *“The servant told him, ‘Your brother has come home. So your father has killed the fattened calf to celebrate your brother’s safe return.’*

The servant happily broke the news to his master’s older son. His younger brother had returned, and his father had prepared a feast to celebrate the occasion. The servant, like the rest of the household, was excited about the younger son’s return. He fully expected the brother to be just as excited. The servant was not merely stating a situation of fact. Rather, he shared not only the facts but also the excitement of the moment. As such, the servant fully expected the older brother to join the banquet as they welcomed his long-lost younger brother.

15:28 *“Then the older son became angry and wouldn’t go into the house. His father came out and begged him to come in.*

Unfortunately, the older son did not share the excitement of the servant and his father’s household. On the contrary, he was so upset that

he would not enter the house. Even though he might have been tired, thirsty, and even hungry for an evening meal, the older son did not see any reason to celebrate his brother's return. A spiritually debilitating anger consumed him. He might have had good reason to be angry. One would expect the father to call the older brother in from the fields to inform him of the circumstances and include him in the excitement of his brother's return and in the preparation of the feast.

The father came out and pleaded with his angry son, begging him to come into the house. Instead of imposing his paternal authority and talking to his perturbed son with a commanding tone, the father looked at his distraught son with love, compassion, and patience. Rather than ordering him to enter the banquet hall, he appealed to his common sense and encouraged him to recognize the momentous occasion that should unite them in joy. The father urged his son to understand and celebrate the victory of life over death and restoration over loss.

15:29 *But he answered his father, 'All these years I've worked like a slave for you. I've never disobeyed one of your commands. Yet, you've never given me so much as a little goat for a celebration with my friends.'*

Even though the older son may have had some reason to be angry, his reaction went too far. Drowning in self-pity and conceit, the older son countered his father's love and patience with a self-justifying, self-righteous rationalization. The son's reaction to his father's love and compassion was one of resentment. He reminded his father how faithfully he had served him like a slave without ever disobeying his instructions. The son further alleged that his father neither acknowledged nor rewarded his loyalty at any time. He complained that his father never gave him even so much as a single goat to share with his friends. In short, the older son accused his father of partiality and a lack of appreciation for his loyalty.

15:30 *But this son of yours spent your money on prostitutes, and when he came home, you killed the fattened calf for him.'*

The distraught older son might have been willing to tolerate what he considered his father's lingering neglect toward him, but to see his younger, disobedient brother lavished with such a celebration was too much to take. He rehearsed the events of the day in light of past facts associated with the situation. He reminded his father that his younger son had rebelled, taken his share of the family fortune, and wasted it on prostitutes. Regardless of these facts, his father not only welcomed his younger son back into the family, but he also celebrated his return with an elaborate banquet. In a sense, the older son accused his father of rewarding rebellion and promiscuity while disregarding loyalty.

15:31 *"His father said to him, 'My child, you're always with me. Everything I have is yours.'*

Still patient, loving, and collected, the father continued to explain the matter to his distraught son in hope of helping him understand the truth that he failed to discern. He told his son that his position with him had always been secure. Everything the father possessed was accessible to the older son because he was his legal heir to the whole estate. He was part of the family and enjoyed unrestrained rights and privileges, enjoying the benefits of his father's fortune. The son's worries were unfounded. If he wanted to take a goat or a lamb to prepare a feast to enjoy with his friends, he could have done so.

The father's response provided assuring reminders that the older son already had more than he needed. He was at home. He was living within the circle of his family and enjoying the abundance of his father's fortune. He was where he belonged. Everything his position as a son offered was at his fingertips. There was nothing else to add to his life. Implied in the father's counsel is the admonition that the son had no grounds to complain about his brother's restoration. The younger brother was surely his father's son, but he no longer had access to an inheritance.

15:32 *But we have something to celebrate, something to be happy about. This brother of yours was dead but has come back to life. He was lost but has been found."*

The father continued to reason with his unhappy son, hoping to change his perspective about his younger brother and the cause for celebration. He patiently offered him an explanation that clearly showed the difference of the status between the two brothers. Unlike the older son, the younger son had faced an incredibly hard and destructive experience even though it was self-inflicted. The father agreed that his younger son had foolishly walked away from his place of privilege, but he proceeded to rejoice that this son ultimately came home again. Meanwhile, the older son remained loyal and continued to enjoy uninterrupted access to privilege and fortune.

The father agreed with his older son's analysis of the younger brother's situation. The younger son's behavior caused his present, destitute condition. Nevertheless, the father could not ignore his younger son's suffering and pain. The father encouraged his older son to realize that his brother's rebellion and resulting depravity ultimately drove him to repentance and restoration. This was the reason for celebration. He was dead, but now he lived. He was lost, but now he was found. The father persisted in expressing the validity of the reason to celebrate the present state of restoration, rather than wallow in the bitter experiences of the past.

Notes/Applications

Jesus' response to the accusation of the Pharisees climaxed in the parable of the "prodigal son." In this powerful and enduring illustration, Jesus emphasized a microcosmic depiction of sin, its consequences, and the remedy. The younger son rebelled, suffered the consequences of his disobedience, was in the end convicted, then repented, and was ultimately restored to his original position by his loving and forgiving father. However, his self-centered older brother reacted with a negative, hostile attitude toward his father for accepting the "prodigal son" back into the family with full rights and privileges. The distraught son

wanted his young brother to remain lost, but also to be permanently stripped of his position in the family. The older son wanted his brother to continue in his lost state and was unwilling to entertain the possibility of his restoration into the household. He felt that his father was at fault for having compassion on his penitent son.

By showing how the evil and the bitterness that was entrenched in the heart of the older son stood in contradistinction to the goodness, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness of the father, Jesus exposed the self-serving hostile attitude of the Pharisees against Him and His ministry of God's redemption, healing, grace, and restoration. God extended the offer of His forgiveness in Jesus Christ even toward these self-righteous Pharisees just as the father encouraged his distraught son to forgive his penitent brother and join the celebration.

The message Jesus was conveying to the Pharisees and the rest of the crowd was abundantly clear. God forgives and restores. Only people have the audacity to argue with God about those whom God is saving. Only people, who somehow believe that others don't measure up to their standard of piety and religious devotion, are blind enough to make such a statement. Even the angels rejoice over each person who repents and is restored to fellowship in the Kingdom. But people get angry. With abominable conceit, they assume that God is correct in saving them, but woefully misguided if He saves someone they don't approve of.

But it is God's approval that counts. Let all the world criticize God for what He is doing among all sorts of people in numerous nations around the world. The genuine believer will always join the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the hosts of heaven over each person that is saved.