

LUKE 15:11-32

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. ²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

ONE EVENING A MOTHER READ TO HER CHILDREN THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON, OUT OF A CHILDREN’S BIBLE.

AFTER SHE FINISHED, SHE ASKED WHAT THEY THOUGHT THE STORY MEANS, AND ONE RESPONDED: “DON’T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT YOUR CREDIT CARD.”

UNFORTUNATELY, YOUNG CHILDREN ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND THE POINT OF THE PARABLE.

PERHAPS THE REASON FOR THIS IS THAT IT CAN MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO US AT DIFFERENT TIMES IN OUR LIVES, AS IS OFTEN THE CASE WITH THE WRITINGS FOUND IN THE BIBLE.

IT MIGHT HELP, THEREFORE, TO LOOK AT THE WORD “PRODIGAL” BECAUSE PEOPLE USUALLY INTERPRET THE WORD AS A REFERENCE TO THE YOUNGER SON ALONE.

THE WORD ACTUALLY CAN BE VIEWED IN TWO WAYS: IT CAN MEAN: “EXCEEDINGLY OR RECKLESSLY WASTEFUL” AND “EXTREMELY OR LAVISHLY GENEROUS.”

THE SECOND DEFINITION OF PRODIGAL COULD BE APPLIED TO THE FATHER IN THE STORY.

THE FATHER WAS GENEROUS TO HIS YOUNGER SON, AND CAST ASIDE THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS OF THE DAY TO ALLOW HIM HIS FREEDOM.

HE COULD BE DESCRIBED AS A MAN OF ABUNDANT LOVE AND GRACE.

THE YOUNGER SON’S ATTITUDE AND ACTIONS FIT THE FIRST DEFINITION OF THE WORD

HE WAS WASTEFUL AND RECKLESS WITH THE INHERITANCE HE DEMANDED AND RECEIVED FROM HIS FATHER.

HIS WORDS AND ACTIONS DEMONSTRATED AN ABUNDANCE OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS AND REBELLION.

THIS BRING US TO HIS OLDER BROTHER, WHO DOES NOT EXACTLY FIT EITHER DEFINITION OF PRODIGAL.

HOWEVER, THE MAN'S ELDEST SON DID SHOW AN ABUNDANCE OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRIDE, NOT TO MENTION ANGER.

SO WITH THIS IN MIND, LET US LOOK AT WHAT WE MIGHT GLEAN TODAY FROM OUR HEARING AND CONTEMPLATION OF THIS PARABLE JESUS TOLD.

LOOKING AT THE REASON JESUS TOLD THE PARABLE IN THE FIRST PLACE IS A NECESSARY STEP IN UNDERSTANDING THE SAVIOR'S MESSAGE.

JESUS HAD BEEN HANGING AROUND AND SHARING A MEAL THE "WRONG" KIND OF PEOPLE.

THEY WERE FELLOW JEWS WHOM THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS VIEWED AS SINNERS.

JESUS TOLD THREE PARABLES IN RESPONSE TO THE CRITICISM OF THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES, DIRECTING THE STORIES AT THEM, AS WELL AS THE OTHERS WHO WERE PRESENT.

THE FIRST WAS THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP, WHO WAS SEARCHED FOR AND FOUND BY THE SHEPHERD.

THE NEXT WAS THE LOST COIN, WHICH THE WOMAN DILIGENTLY SEARCHED FOR UNTIL SHE FOUND.

AND THE PARABLE WE CALL THE "PRODIGAL SON" IS THE THIRD STORY. IN IT THE FATHER WATCHED AND WAITED FOR HIS RETURN.

ALL THREE STORIES CAN BE APPROACHED FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES: FROM THAT OF THE SHEPHERD, THE WOMAN, AND THE FATHER.

WE CAN ALSO SEE ALL THREE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE LOST SHEEP, COIN, AND YOUNGER SON.

LOOKING AT THE YOUNGER THE SON, WE SEE HE WAS SHOWN GREAT MERCY BY HIS FATHER.

WHILE THE MAN DID NOT LEAVE HOME TO SEARCH FOR HIS SON, HE DID HOPE FOR AND WATCH FOR HIS RETURN.

THE MESSAGE HERE IS FOR ALL THOSE WHO HAVE REBELLED AGAINST GOD, WHETHER YOU DID SO IN IGNORANCE, OR DELIBERATELY- GOD HAS THE WELCOME MAT OUT FOR YOU.

JESUS IS TELLING US IN THIS PARABLE THAT OUR HEAVENLY FATHER WILL FORGIVE THOSE WHO RETURN TO HIM.

THIS MEANS-WE NEED NOT BE AFRAID THAT WE HAVE SAID OR DONE SOMETHING, OR FAILED IN SOMEWAY THAT IS BEYOND THE SCOPE OR DESIRE OF GOD TO FORGIVE.

AFTER ALL, THAT IS WHY JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS IN THE FIRST PLACE-TO PROVIDE FOR OUR FORGIVENESS.

THE THIRD PARABLE HOWEVER GIVES US ANOTHER VIEW TO LOOK AT THE STORY FROM, WHICH IS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE OLDER BROTHER.

IN FACT, IT WAS THE ELDEST SON OF THAT FATHER JESUS WANTED THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES TO IDENTIFY WITH.

HE WAS THE LOYAL AND OBEDIENT SON, DILIGENT IN HIS WORK AND SEEMINGLY RESPECTFUL OF HIS FATHER.

IN OTHER WORDS, HE FAITHFULLY FOLLOWED BOTH BIBLICAL LAW AND SOCIAL CUSTOM IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER.

BUT IT SEEMS HE MAY HAVE LACKED ONE IMPORTANT THING, HIS WORDS AND BEHAVIOR, AT THE END OF THE STORY, REVEAL HIS FAILURE TO REALLY LOVE HIS FATHER.

SADLY, THIS SON FAILED TO SEE HIS FATHER AS LOVING, BUT INSTEAD SPOKE AND ACTED AS IF HE WERE A STERN MASTER.

THIS BROTHER IN THE PARABLE IS LIKE A MIRROR FOR FAITHFUL CHURCH GOING CHRISTIANS TO LOOK IN.

INDEED, THE SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE BROTHER POINTS NOT ONLY TO THAT OF THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS, BUT ALSO CAN BE APPLIED TO SOME RELIGIOUS CHRISTIANS.

JESUS, THROUGH THIS PARABLE, REMINDS US THAT WE NEED TO REMEMBER GOD'S LOVE IS NOT JUST FOR THOSE WHO REMAIN LOYAL TO HIM, BUT ALSO FOR HIS REBELLIOUS AND WAYWARD CHILDREN.

AND LET US NOT FORGET, IT IS EASIER THAN WE MAY THINK TO SLIP INTO THE SHOES OF THE ELDER BROTHER.

FOR EXAMPLE: WHEN I WAS IN MY LATE 20'S I WORKED WITH A WOMAN WHO WAS A FAIRLY NEW CHRISTIAN.

SHE WAS A NICE PERSON AND A GOOD WORKER AND YET SHE SOMETIMES IRRITATED ME.

THE PROBLEM WAS HER TENDENCY TO MENTION THINGS SHE HAD DONE IN HER PAST BEFORE SHE WAS SAVED, AND THEN ADD "BUT THAT WAS BEFORE I WAS A CHRISTIAN."

MY PROBLEM WITH IT WAS TWO-FOLD, FIRST I FELT SOME SHAME BECAUSE I COULD NOT SAY THAT ABOUT MY SINS.

IN OTHER WORDS, FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER MY SINS WERE DONE, AND STILL ARE DONE, AS A CHRISTIAN.

THE OTHER THING I FELT SOMETIMES WAS, A TWINGE OF JEALOUSY OVER A FEW OF THE THINGS THIS WOMAN HAD DONE THAT SOUNDED INTERESTING TO ME.

PART OF ME ALMOST WISHED I COULD HAVE DONE A FEW OF THOSE THINGS I FELT WERE WRONG TO DO AS A CHRISTIAN, AND THEN BE SAVED AND HAVE IT ALL FORGIVEN.

OF COURSE, I DID NOT REALLY WISH TO GIVE UP JESUS EVEN FOR A DAY, TO DO ANY OF IT, BUT I STILL FELT SOME ENVY OVER SOME OF THE WOMAN'S PAST EXPERIENCES.

SIMILARLY, IT SEEMS THAT PART OF THE ANGER THE OLDER BROTHER HAD WHEN THEIR FATHER WELCOMED HIS REBELLIOUS SON HOME, MIGHT HAVE BEEN JEALOUSY.

THE ELDER SON POINTED OUT ALL HE HAD DONE FOR HIS FATHER, INCLUDING NEVER EVEN ASKING FOR THE RESOURCES TO THROW A PARTY FOR HIS FRIENDS.

HE IMAGINED, IT SEEMS ALL THE FUN HIS YOUNGER BROTHER HAD, WHILE HE OBEDIENTLY STAYED HOME AND WORKED.

AND YET, HE DID NOT KNOW HOW MUCH HIS YOUNGER BROTHER SUFFERED FROM HIS BAD CHOICES.

ALL HE SAW WAS THAT HIS BROTHER WAS WELCOMED BACK INTO THE FAMILY AS IF HE HAD DONE NOTHING WRONG.

AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE THEIR FATHER THREW A NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY BECAUSE THE BOY CAME BACK TO HIM.

LET'S FACE IT, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ELDER BROTHER IT WAS UNFAIR.

HOWEVER, WHAT HE FAILED TO REALIZED WAS THE DEPTH OF THEIR FATHER'S ABUNDANT LOVE AND MERCY.

THIS WAS PRECISELY WHAT JESUS WAS HOPING BOTH THOSE WHO HAD STRAYED FROM GOD GRASPED, AS WELL AS WHAT HE WANTED RELIGIOUS JEWS TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT.

GOD'S LOVE IS SO GREAT, DARE WE SAY EXTRAVAGANT, THAT HE "WASTES" IT ON THOSE WE MAY FEEL ARE UNDESERVING.

HOWEVER, THIS IN NO WAY DIMINISHES GOD'S LOVE FOR US OR ANYONE WHO STRIVES TO BE FAITHFUL AND OBEDIENT TO HIM.

REMEMBER THE FATHER'S WORDS TO HIS ANGRY ELDER SON? "...YOU ARE ALWAYS WITH ME AND ALL THAT IS MINE IS YOURS."

IN OTHER WORDS, THE OLDEST SON WAS NOT GOING TO LOSE ANY OF HIS INHERITANCE BECAUSE HIS FATHER WELCOMED HIS BROTHER HOME.

WE ALSO LOOSE NOTHING WHEN GOD FORGIVES SOME ELSE, EVEN IF WE DO NOT THINK THE PERSON DESERVES IT.

NOTICE ALSO, HOW THE FATHER WENT OUTSIDE TO SPEAK TO HIS ANGRY SON AND PLEAD WITH HIM TO ENTER.

THE MAN WAS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS SON'S FEELINGS AND WANTED HIM TO BE RECONCILED WITH HIS BROTHER.

HE EXPLAINED THAT THE CELEBRATION WAS NOT IN HONOR OF HIS BROTHER- BUT WAS HIS WAY TO EXPRESS HIS JOY THAT THE YOUNG MAN HAD RETURNED TO THEM.

HERE HE SHOWS FORGIVENESS TO THE ELDER SON, WHO WAS BY HIS REFUSAL TO ENTER, AND WORDS TO HIS FATHER, BEING REBELLIOUS IN HIS OWN WAY.

HERE JESUS REMINDS US GOD LOVES THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS JUST AS MUCH AS ANY OTHER PERSON.

YES, GOD LOVES THE PILLARS OF THE CHURCH AS MUCH AS THOSE WHO NEVER DARKEN THE DOOR OF A CHURCH.

THE SAVIOR IS REMINDING ALL OF US THAT GOD'S LOVE, FORGIVENESS, AND GRACE OVERFLOW WITH ABUNDANCE.

THEY ARE LIKE A WELL THAT WILL NEVER RUN DRY, SO WE NEED NOT FEAR THERE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH FOR US- IF GOD IS EXTRAVAGANT IN GIVING HIS LOVE TO OTHERS.

THIS PARABLE ALSO REMINDS US THAT GOD DOES NOT GIVE UP ON US.

THEREFORE, IT TEACHES US THAT AS CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS WE OUGHT NOT TO GIVE UP ON OTHERS, OR OURSELVES.

INDEED, THE MORAL OF THE STORY IS THAT WHEN WE TURN BACK TO HIM, GOD RUNS TO MEET IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, HIS SON.

IN CLOSING, A POEM BY CAROL WIMMER DESCRIBES SALVATION IN A WAY THAT MAY HELP US NO MATTER WHERE WE PLACE OURSELVES IN THE PARABLE.

“WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” -I’M NOT SHOUTING, “I’VE BEEN SAVED!” I’M WHISPERING, “I GET LOST SOMETIMES THAT’S WHY I CHOSE THIS WAY.”

WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” I DON’T SPEAK WITH HUMAN PRIDE. I’M CONFESSING THAT I STUMBLE –NEEDING GOD TO BE MY GUIDE.

WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” I’M NOT TRYING TO BE STRONG. I’M PROFESSING THAT I’M WEAK AND PRAY FOR STRENGTH TO CARRY ON.

WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” I’M NOT BRAGGING OF SUCCESS. I’M ADMITTING THAT I’VE FAILED AND CANNOT EVER PAY THE DEBT.

WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” I DON’T THINK I KNOW IT ALL I SUBMIT TO MY CONFUSION ASKING HUMBLY TO BE TAUGHT.

WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” I’M NOT CLAIMING TO BE PERFECT. MY FLAWS ARE FAR TOO VISIBLE BUT GOD BELIEVES I’M WORTH IT.

WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” I STILL FEEL THE STING OF PAIN. I HAVE MY SHARE OF HEARTACHE WHICH IS WHY I SEEK GOD’S NAME. WHEN I SAY, “I AM A CHRISTIAN” I DO NOT WISH TO JUDGE. I HAVE NO AUTHORITY I ONLY KNOW I’M LOVED.

LET US PRAY: GOD OF STEADFAST LOVE AND MERCY, REMIND US ONCE AGAIN THAT IN JESUS CHRIST EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW. FOR FAR TOO OFTEN, THINGS SEEM AS THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN: OLD HABITS DIE HARD, DIFFICULT SITUATIONS LINGER, FAILURES FROM OUR PAST LINGER. WE LOOK FOR YOUR PROMISED NEWNESS BUT CANNOT SEE IT. SPEAK TO US AGAIN OF YOUR NEW CREATION. OPEN OUR EYES TO ITS PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES. CALL US FORTH TO CLAIM THIS NEWNESS, THAT WE MAY BE HEALED AND MADE WHOLE. IN JESUS’ NAME WE PRAY. AMEN.

SERMON SUMMARY: LUKE 15:11-32

THE WORD “PRODIGAL” CAN BE VIEWED IN TWO WAYS: IT CAN MEAN: “EXCEEDINGLY OR RECKLESSLY WASTEFUL” AND “EXTREMELY OR LAVISHLY GENEROUS.”

THE SECOND DEFINITION OF PRODIGAL COULD BE APPLIED TO THE FATHER IN THE STORY. THE FATHER WAS GENEROUS TO HIS YOUNGER SON, AND CAST ASIDE THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS OF THE DAY TO ALLOW HIM HIS FREEDOM. HE COULD BE DESCRIBED AS A MAN OF ABUNDANT LOVE AND GRACE.

THE YOUNGER SON’S ATTITUDE AND ACTIONS FIT THE FIRST DEFINITION OF THE WORD. HE WAS WASTEFUL AND RECKLESS WITH THE INHERITANCE HE DEMANDED AND RECEIVED FROM HIS FATHER. HIS WORDS AND ACTIONS DEMONSTRATED AN ABUNDANCE OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS AND REBELLION.

THIS BROTHER IN THE PARABLE IS LIKE A MIRROR FOR FAITHFUL, CHURCH GOING CHRISTIANS TO LOOK IN. INDEED, THE SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE BROTHER POINTS NOT ONLY TO THAT OF THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS, BUT ALSO SOME RELIGIOUS CHRISTIANS.

JESUS, THROUGH THIS PARABLE, REMINDS US THAT WE TOO NEED TO REMEMBER GOD’S LOVE IS NOT JUST FOR THOSE WHO REMAIN LOYAL TO HIM, BUT ALSO FOR HIS REBELLIOUS AND WAYWARD CHILDREN.

IT SEEMS THAT PART OF THE ANGER THE OLDER BROTHER HAD WHEN THEIR FATHER WELCOMED HIS REBELLIOUS SON HOME, MIGHT HAVE BEEN JEALOUSY. THE ELDER SON POINTED OUT ALL HE HAD DONE FOR HIS FATHER, INCLUDING NEVER EVEN ASKING FOR THE RESOURCES TO THROUGH A PARTY FOR HIS FRIENDS.

HE IMAGINED, IT SEEMS ALL THE FUN HIS YOUNGER BROTHER HAD, WHILE HE OBEDIENTLY STAYED HOME AND WORKED. AND YET, HE DID NOT KNOW HOW MUCH HIS YOUNGER BROTHER SUFFERED FROM HIS BAD CHOICES.

ALL HE SAW WAS THAT HIS BROTHER WAS WELCOMED BACK INTO THE FAMILY AS IF HE HAD DONE NOTHING WRONG. AND TO MAKE MATTER WORSE THEIR FATHER THREW A NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY BECAUSE THE BOY CAME BACK TO HIM.

LET’S FACE IT, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ELDER BROTHER IT WAS UNFAIR. HOWEVER, WHAT HE FAILED TO REALIZED WAS THE DEPTH OF THEIR FATHER’S ABUNDANT LOVE AND MERCY.

THIS WAS PRECISELY WHAT JESUS WAS HOPING BOTH THOSE WHO HAD STRAYED FROM GOD GRASPED, AS WELL AS WHAT HE WANTED RELIGIOUS JEWS TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT.

GOD’S LOVE IS SO GREAT THAT HE ‘WASTES IT’ ON THOSE WE MAY FEEL ARE UNDESERVING. HOWEVER, THIS IN NO WAY DIMINISHES GOD’S LOVE FOR US OR ANYONE WHO STRIVES TO BE FAITHFUL AND OBEDIENT TO HIM.

WE ALSO LOOSE NOTHING WHEN GOD FORGIVES SOME ELSE, EVEN IF WE DO NOT THINK THE PERSON DESERVES IT. NOTICE ALSO, HOW THE FATHER WENT OUTSIDE TO SPEAK TO HIS ANGRY SON AND PLEAD WITH HIM TO ENTER. THE MAN WAS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS SON’S FEELINGS AND WANTED HIM TO BE RECONCILED WITH HIS BROTHER.

HERE HE SHOWS FORGIVENESS TO THE ELDER SON, WHO WAS BY HIS REFUSAL TO ENTER AND WORDS TO HIS FATHER, BEING REBELLIOUS IN HIS OWN WAY. HERE JESUS REMINDS US GOD LOVES THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS JUST AS MUCH AS ANY OTHER PERSON. YES, GOD LOVES THE PILLARS OF THE CHURCH AS MUCH AS THOSE WHO NEVER DARKEN THE DOOR OF A CHURCH. THE SAVIOR IS REMINDING ALL OF US THAT GOD’S LOVE, FORGIVENESS, AND GRACE OVERFLOW WITH ABUNDANCE

THIS PARABLE ALSO REMINDS US THAT GOD DOES NOT GIVE UP ON US. THEREFORE, IT TEACHES US THAT AS CHRIST’S FOLLOWERS WE OUGHT NOT TO GIVE UP ON OTHERS, OR OURSELVES. INDEED, THE MORAL OF THE STORY IS THAT WHEN WE TURN BACK TO HIM, GOD RUNS TO MEETS IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, HIS SON. AMEN