



Living Walking Serving

FAITH AND GRACE CHURCH

**LEARNING FROM THE MASTER
(JESUS CHRIST- OUR CHIEF CORNERSTONE)**

STUDY 21-46 – THE PARABLES OF JESUS - Parable No. 22-The parable of The Prodigal Son

Text: Luke 15:11-32

LAST WEEK: Parable No. 20&21: Parable No. 20&21-The parable of The Lost Sheep and Lost coin (Luke 15:3-10)

LESSONS:

God has a tender, personal concern, and a joyous love for individuals who are lost (in sin) and are found (repent).

Parable No. 22-The parable of The Prodigal Son

(Luke 15:11-32)

INTRODUCTION

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is found in Luke chapter 15, verses 11-32. The main character in the parable, the forgiving father, whose character remains constant throughout the story, is a picture of God. In telling the story, Jesus identifies Himself with God in His loving attitude to the lost. The younger son symbolizes the lost (the tax collectors and sinners of that day, Luke 15:1), and the elder brother represents the self-righteous (the Pharisees and teachers of the law of that day, Luke 15:2). The major theme of this parable seems not to be so much the conversion of the sinner, as in the previous two parables of Luke 15, but rather the restoration of a believer into fellowship with the Father. In the first two parables, the owner went out to look for what was lost (Luke 15:1-10), whereas in this story the father waits and watches eagerly for his son's return. We see a progression through the three parables from the relationship of one in a hundred (Luke 15:1-7), to one in ten (Luke 15:8-10), to one in one (Luke 15:11-32), demonstrating God's love for each individual and His personal attentiveness towards all humanity. We see in this story the graciousness of the father overshadowing the sinfulness of the son, as it is the memory of the father's goodness that brings the prodigal son to repentance (Romans 2:4).

The younger son asks his father for his share of his estate, which would have been half of what his older brother would receive; in other words, 1/3 for the younger, 2/3 for the older (Deuteronomy 21:17). Though it was perfectly within his rights to ask, it was not a loving thing to do, as it implied that he wished his father dead. Instead of rebuking his son, the father patiently grants him his request. This is a picture of God letting a sinner go his own way (Deuteronomy 30:19). We all possess this foolish ambition to be independent, which is at the root of the sinner persisting in his sin (Genesis 3:6; Romans 1:28).

Verse 13: He travels to a distant country and in the process, squanders all his father had worked so hard for on selfish, shallow fulfillment, losing everything. His financial disaster is followed by a natural disaster in the form of a famine, which he failed to plan for (Genesis 41:33-36). At this point he sells himself into physical slavery to a Gentile and finds himself feeding pigs, a detestable job to the Jewish people (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8; Isaiah 65:4; 66:17). Needless to say, he must have been incredibly desperate at that point to willingly enter into such a loathsome position. And what an irony that his choices led him to a position in which he had no choice but to work, and for a stranger at that, doing the very things he refused to do for his father. To top it off, he apparently was paid so little that he longed to eat the pig's food. Just when he must have thought life could not get any

worse, he couldn't even find mercy among the people. Apparently, once his wealth was gone, so were his friends. (vs. 16). Even these unclean animals seemed to be better off than he was at this point. This is a picture of the state of the lost sinner or a rebellious Christian who has returned to a life of slavery to sin (2 Peter 2:19-21). It is a picture of what sin really does in a person's life when he rejects the Father's will (Hebrews 12:1; Acts 8:23). "Sin always promises more than it gives, takes you further than you wanted to go, and leaves you worse off than you were before." Sin promises freedom but brings slavery (John 8:34).

The son begins to reflect on his condition and realizes that even his father's servants had it better than he. His painful circumstances help him to see his father in a new light and bring him hope (Psalm 147:11; Isaiah 40:30-31; Romans 8:24-25; 1 Timothy 4:10). This is reflective of the sinner when he/she discovers the destitute condition of his life because of sin. It is a realization that, apart from God, there is no hope (Ephesians 2:12; 2 Timothy 2:25-26). This is when a repentant sinner "comes to his senses" and longs to return to the state of fellowship with God which was lost when Adam sinned (Genesis 3:8). The son devises a plan of action that demonstrates a true humility and true repentance, not based on what he said but on what he was willing to do and eventually acted upon (Acts 26:20). He realizes he had no right to claim a blessing upon return to his father's household, nor does he have anything to offer, except a life of service, in repentance of his previous actions. With that, he is prepared to fall at his father's feet and hope for forgiveness and mercy. This is exactly what conversion is all about: ending a life of slavery to sin through confession to the Father and faith in Jesus Christ and becoming a slave to righteousness, offering one's body as a living sacrifice (1 John 1:9; Romans 6:6-18; 12:1).

Jesus portrays the father as waiting for his son, when the father reaches his son, not only does he throw his arms around him, but he also greets him with a kiss of love (1 Peter 5:14). He is so filled with joy at his son's return that he doesn't even let him finish his confession. Nor does he question or lecture him; instead, he unconditionally forgives him and accepts him back into fellowship. The father running to his son, greeting him with a kiss and ordering the celebration is a picture of how our Heavenly Father feels towards sinners who repent. God greatly loves us, patiently waits for us to repent so he can show us His great mercy, because he does not want any to perish nor escape as though by the fire (Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Corinthians 3:15).

This prodigal son was satisfied to return home as a slave, but to his surprise and delight is restored back into the full privilege of being his father's son. He had been transformed from a state of destitution to complete restoration. That is what God's grace does for a penitent sinner (Psalm 40:2; 103:4). Not only are we forgiven, but we receive a spirit of sonship as His children, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, of His incomparable riches (Romans 8:16-17; Ephesians 1:18-19). The father then orders the servants to bring the best robe, no doubt one of his own (a sign of dignity and honor, proof of the prodigal's acceptance back into the family), a ring for the son's hand (a sign of authority and sonship) and sandals for his feet (a sign of not being a servant, as servants did not wear shoes—or, for that matter, rings or expensive clothing, vs.22). All these things represent what we receive in Christ upon salvation: the robe of the Redeemer's righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), the privilege of partaking of the Spirit of adoption (Ephesians 1:5), and feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, prepared to walk in the ways of holiness (Ephesians 6:15). A fattened calf is prepared, and a party is held (notice that blood was shed = atonement for sin, Hebrews 9:22). This was not just any party; it was a rare and complete celebration. Had the boy been dealt with according to the Law, there would have been a funeral, not a celebration. (Psalm 103:10-13, Romans 8:1; John 5:24). Note the parallel between "dead" and "alive" and "lost" and "found"—terms that also apply to one's state before and after conversion to Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5). This is a picture of what occurs in heaven over one repentant sinner (Luke 15: 7, 10).

Now to the final and tragic character in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the oldest son, who, once again, illustrates the Pharisees and the scribes. Outwardly they lived blameless lives, but inwardly their attitudes were abominable (Matthew 23:25-28). This was true of the older son who worked hard, obeyed his father, and brought no disgrace to his family or townspeople. It is obvious by his words and actions, upon his brother's return, that he is not showing love for his father or brother. One of the duties of the eldest son would have included reconciliation between the father and his son. He would have been the host at the feast to celebrate his brother's return. Yet he remains in the field

instead of in the house where he should have been. This act alone would have brought public disgrace upon the father. Still, the father, with great patience, goes to his angry and hurting son. He does not rebuke him as his actions and disrespectful address of his father warrant (vs.29, "Look," he says, instead of addressing him as "father" or "my lord"), nor does his compassion cease as he listens to his complaints and criticisms. The boy appeals to his father's righteousness by proudly proclaiming his own self-righteousness in comparison to his brother's sinfulness (Matthew 7:3-5). By saying, "This son of yours," the older brother avoids acknowledging that the prodigal is his own brother (vs. 30). Just like the Pharisees, the older brother was defining sin by outward actions, not inward attitudes (Luke 18:9-14). In essence, the older brother is saying that he was the one worthy of the celebration, and his father had been ungrateful for all his work. Now the one who had squandered his wealth was getting what he, the older son, deserved. The father tenderly addresses his oldest as "my son" (vs. 31) and corrects the error in his thinking by referring to the prodigal son as "this brother of yours" (vs. 32). The father's response, "We had to celebrate," suggests that the elder brother should have joined in the celebration, as there seems to be a sense of urgency in not postponing the celebration of the brother's return.

The older brother's focus was on himself, and as a result there is no joy in his brother's arrival home. He is so consumed with issues of justice and equity that he fails to see the value of his brother's repentance and return. He fails to realize that "anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him" (1 John 2:9-11). The older brother allows anger to take root in his heart to the point that he is unable to show compassion towards his brother, and, for that matter he is unable to forgive the perceived sin of his father against him (Genesis 4:5-8). He prefers to nurse his anger rather than enjoy fellowship with his father, brother and the community. He chooses suffering and isolation over restoration and reconciliation (Matthew 5:24, 6:14-15). He sees his brother's return as a threat to his own inheritance. After all, why should he have to share his portion with a brother who has squandered his? And why hadn't his father rejoiced in his presence through his faithful years of service?

The wise father seeks to bring restoration by pointing out that all he has is and has always been available for the asking to his obedient son, as it was his portion of the inheritance since the time of the allotment. The older son never utilized the blessings at his disposal (Galatians 5:22; 2 Peter 1:5-8). This is similar to the Pharisees with their religion of good works. They hoped to earn blessings from God and in their obedience merit eternal life (Romans 9:31-33; 10:3). They failed to understand the grace of God and failed to comprehend the meaning of forgiveness. It was, therefore, not what they did that became a stumbling block to their growth but rather what they did not do which alienated them from God (Matthew 23:23-24, Romans 10:4). They were irate when Jesus was receiving and forgiving "unholy" people, failing to see their own need for a Savior. We do not know how this story ended for the oldest son, but we do know that the Pharisees continued to oppose Jesus and separate themselves from His followers. Despite the father's pleading for them to "come in," they refused and were the ones who instigated the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:59). A tragic ending to a story filled with such hope, mercy, joy, and forgiveness.

The picture of the father receiving the son back into relationship is a picture of how we should respond to repentant sinners as well (1 John 4:20-21; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We are included in that "all," and we must remember that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" apart from Christ (Isaiah 64:6; John 15:1-6). It is only by God's grace that we are saved, not by works that we may boast of (Ephesians 2:9; Romans 9:16; Psalm 51:5). That is the core message of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.