

Sermon

"Prodigal God"
(Luke 15:1-3, 11-32)
Rev. Dr. Espinosa

Introduction: The definition of "prodigal"...adjective, 1. Recklessly extravagant; 2. Having spent everything.

1. Perhaps the most popular of all of Jesus' parables!
2. This is my personal favorite, as indeed I have always felt that I am a recovering prodigal son! And how I thank God for my dad who confronted me with loving discipline!
3. The title of the parable, however, leads us to focus on one son, but there are *two* sons and they both have major issues!
 - a. In fact, given the fact that text informs us that the Pharisees were listening to Jesus and grumbling, it was the older brother contrasted to the younger brother who represented the proud Pharisees.
 - b. However, *both* brothers speak to the broad spectrum of sinners under two basic categories:
 - 1) The bad rebels...those who are immoral and irreligious. These reject the Lord and say, "I'm the only one who can decide what is right and wrong for me. I'm going to live as I want to live and find my true self and happiness that way. (Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 31)"

2) The "good" rebels...those who are moral and quite religious. These reject the Lord and say, "I'm not going to do what I want, but what tradition and the community want me to do. (Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 31)."

c. **Both** are far from the God and the saving Gospel! **Why?** Because both live for something other than the Lord; both resent the father's authority; and both wanted to tell the father (the Lord) what to do!

4. Still, the most important figure in the parable is *neither* the younger son *nor* the older son, but the most important figure is the father! First things first though...let's get into the parable!

Part I: The Younger Son...

1. The younger son was to receive 1/3 of the inheritance from the father when the father decided, but not this younger son! In effect he wanted to control his father and essentially said, "hurry up and die!" (v 12)
2. He took a journey to a far country (v 13). For the Jew this meant gross compromise of identity. He was headed to live with Gentiles and become unclean!
3. He squandered his property in reckless living (v 13). Think of the tremendous disgrace this son was casting on his family!
4. When famine struck (v 14), he got a job feeding pigs (v 15) which indicated just how low this son had gone! He was now working with the most filthy of animals!

5. His disgusting position is epitomized by longing to eat pig food (v 16).
6. Pause here: again, the Pharisees were listening to Jesus tell this parable. What do you think these Pharisees were thinking about at this point?
7. They must have been shocked to hear about this father!

Part II: The Father...

1. V 20: the father is full of compassion! The Pharisees must have thought that there was something wrong with this father...such a son should have been stoned to death! (Deut 21:18-21)
2. V 20: this father runs to his son! This was a no-no in this culture...totally undignified for the father to do this.
3. V 20: embraced and kissed him (Greek: kissed profusely)! What? This pig-food eater who wished that I die early and who disgraced the family name?!
4. V. 21: the father is so glad to have his son back that the son cannot even complete his prepared confession!
5. V 22: Robe (high distinction!); Ring (the father's authority!); and Sandals (a son not a slave!).
6. V 23: Fattened calf: SACRIFICED in order to celebrate NEW LIFE...the son was dead and now was alive! (v 24)
7. This was PRODIGAL!
8. The Father was seemingly spending everything on this son! Esp. to the older son, the Father must have seemed recklessly extravagant!
9. The Father is an image of Jesus towards the lowest sinners known to the Jews. This Jesus would spend

EVERYTHING for these sinners (His very life)!

10. This is a picture of amazing grace and it is not free, but quite costly and this shows how much you are loved by God!

Part III: The Older Son was no better and in fact might have been in the more serious position.

1. The Pharisees must have been shocked to realize that Jesus was describing them!
2. The older son could not believe what had happened! (v 28)
3. He disrespected the father and says, "Look!" (v 29)
4. But notice what the father was doing: He was also entreating this son as well...He loved this son too! (v 28)
5. This older son was so good! So moral! So obedient! (v 29)...but **why** had he done all of these things? Answer: to get what he wanted from the Father...not out of love, but out of a self-serving agenda!

Thus: "Careful obedience to God's law may serve as a strategy for rebelling against God." (Keller, *ibid*, 37)

6. The older son resented the younger son; he hated the overt sinner! Luke 18:9-14 is read here.
7. But the father did not stop entreating; the father still loved this son as well! (v 31)
8. And the father – our Lord – to this day celebrates your new life in Christ! We were dead in our sin, God made us alive; though we were lost, God found us in Christ.

Conclusion: Avoid both life-styles which try to tell God what to do! Instead we seek to know that Jesus is our true love! What does such a life look like?

1. This Life in Christ is Experiential: faith acknowledges the feast, the celebration that God has over us in Christ! I was dead, now I'm alive; I was lost, now I'm found! Think of how this joy is like as you consider levels of relationships:
 - a. God is not a co-worker
 - b. God is not merely a friend
 - c. God is our greatest LOVE
2. This Life in Christ is Material: faith gives as it receives (Matt. 25) serving real people with their bodily needs!
Luther: "We are saved by faith alone [not our works], but not by faith that remains alone."
3. This Life in Christ is Individual: seeks to be fed through the means of grace, esp. Holy Communion FOR YOU!
4. This Life in Christ is Communal: faith also lives in the BODY of Christ (the Church) receiving the BODY of Christ (the Sacrament). We must live in the community of the local Christian congregation. The Church is God's creation for us to live as the family of God!

To summarize:

1. Know that you are LOVED, so celebrate! Who would ever want to control God from this vantage point?
2. Live out this faith by serving the real needs of others! You'll be too busy serving others to spend too much time serving yourself!
3. Eat up and drink up when it comes to God's gifts of

Word and Sacrament FOR YOU! We must be eager and thirsty for God's gifts which gives us Jesus!

4. We go to church...we worship and we live as the body of Christ in community encouraging one another, confessing together, witnessing and worshipping together!

These things protect us from the immoral lifestyle of the younger brother; and from the moral lifestyle of the older brother that was also seeking to live for self so as to take God's place.

But the good news is that God knows you, He still and always will love you, and all of this grounded and proven in Jesus...the one thing needful; the only answer to younger *and* older brothers...Jesus, our Prodigal God who did not think it was too much to pour out His very life FOR YOU!