

2/23/25 Christ Fellowship

The Prodigal Son – Luke 15

A few years ago, for my 50th birthday, my two sisters took me on a road trip to Port Aransas. We had a great time just hanging out on the beach and eating good food and having fun, not feeling the need to impress anybody or do anything we didn't want to do. And I remember one evening, close to sundown, we went to an ice cream shop not far from the beach and we all got some ice cream and just hung out on the porch of this place laughing and having fun.

We took a lot of pictures and we would take turns sending those pictures back home to our mother just to let her know what we were doing. And my sister Sally took my picture as we were hanging out at the ice cream shop that evening and texted it back to mom. And I remember what Mama replied. It was not, *“Oh, I'm glad y'all are having fun.”* It wasn't, *“Oh he doesn't look fifty.”* It sure wasn't, *“Aw, Todd looks so handsome!”* Her reply was, *“Well...a lot can happen in 50 years.”* Which was Mama's nice way of saying, *“Well...he's hideous.”* She might as well have said, *“He's a monster. Please quit taking pictures of him.”*

When was the last time you looked in the mirror and thought, *“Oh, that's nice! I still have it!”* For some of you it might have been this morning but for most of us older folks, it's been a while. It's the same with looking at scripture. How many of you read Proverbs and see yourself as the foolish man and how many of you are the wise man?

Proverbs 15 says, *“The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.”* When we read that, we all say, *“Oh, yes, I'm the wise one. Knowledge adorns my tongue. Very wise. Very wise.”* Right? Well, whether you are correct in your assessment or not, I have a passage that we can all see is a picture of us. And it does not make us look good but it does make God look good and that's what we are after today. Turn in your Bibles to **Luke chapter 15** where we are continuing our look at the parables of Jesus and here we see the very famous parable of the prodigal son.

When you hear the word “prodigal” you probably all think of this son who basically ran off and came back but the word actually means to be wasteful. It means to spend money on unnecessary things. So, right there we can probably all see ourselves just in the title of the parable. But this parable is not as much about the boy being wasteful as it is about him being away from his father. And again, we can all see ourselves in that boy as we have all spent some time away from our Heavenly Father.

For some people, it may just be a few hours but for some of us it may be an embarrassingly long time. When Billy gives his testimony, I always appreciate that he doesn't dwell on his past. He says that's his blah, blah, blah – all that bad stuff he did before he met Jesus. And some of us have a lot of blah, blah, blah and some of us don't have as much. But we have all had our prodigal son times. We have all spent time away from God. The real focus of this parable is not on the blah, blah, blah of the son but on the reactions of the Father. Let's look at it in **Luke 15:11-32**.

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.’”

Last week I watched one of my favorite classic movies again for the billionth time. “The Magnificent Seven.” Do you remember it? Yul Brenner and Steve McQueen. Good stuff! In there, the king of cool, Steve McQueen has a great couple of lines. You need to watch the show to really understand it but the bad guy asks him why he decided to come back to this little village to help the poor people there and McQueen tells him a quick story.

He said he once knew a man who took off all his clothes and jumped into a pile of cactus. He said, ***“I asked him why he did it and he said...it seemed like the thing to do at the time.”***

It doesn’t make any sense and that’s the point. It’s the same when we sin and fall away from the Father. It seems to make sense when we are tempted. You know what I mean. *“Well, if I do this, it will give me what I want. I don’t want to wait for God to give it to me. Even though He has always been good and faithful and generous, I want it all now. It seems like the thing to do right now.”*

That’s where the young son is in this story. He couldn’t wait to be given his share when his father died. He wanted it all right now. And for those of us that have jumped in that cactus before, we think, *“That boy was so foolish. I would never do that.”* And yet, we do it every time we sin.

We talked a while back about temptation and we know that sometimes Satan tempts us and sometimes it comes from the world and sometimes it comes from that old, sinful man inside of us. Well, Satan is not just a liar but he is also an actor. And he can convince you that this sin is going to give you what you want and what you need. And you don’t need to wait on God. This will be great! Get away from all those rules and laws that God has. You don’t need those. You need this sin. And he is a great actor to make us think that.

Now, the world sometimes means well. Sometimes the people of this world want to help you. But the problem is, they have been deceived by the great actor, Satan. And in their

deception, they give you wrong advice. But how many of you have been there and know that it always starts out so exciting. There's energy, there's passion. There's excitement...until you get what you want and then realize it's not really what you wanted after all. And then comes the consequences of our actions. The energy, passion and excitement turns into pain, guilt and problems.

Look at **verses 14-15** again. *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.* It's hard for us to conceive of the shame this young Jewish boy would have had feeding pigs. As a Jew, he was taught that pigs are the lowest and dirtiest of animals. A good Jew wouldn't even be near a pig, much less feeding them. It would also bring great shame to his family if they knew.

But the great actor and liar, Satan, said this will be great! You'll love it. And it probably was great...for a little while. **Hebrews 11:25** says sin is pleasurable for a little while. But we all know, just like this young boy found out the hard way, that with sin comes pain, guilt and problems. Sin never brings the fulfillment, joy and happiness it promises but always pain, guilt and problems.

I heard the story years ago from a missionary who had gone to India. He said he went down to the river to get some water just before sundown and when he got here, he noticed about a hundred yards or so upstream was a beautiful woman taking a bath. He said he could only see her silhouette in the fading light but her figure was quite attractive. He looked around and nobody else was there so he decided to get a better look. So, he walked down the bank until he could peek around a tree and get a good look at her and that's when he noticed that her skin was eaten up with the scabs and sores of leprosy.

Sin is always that way. It looks good from a distance. It promises a good time. It promises fulfillment. It promises happiness. And always winds up giving pain, guilt and problems. That's what the prodigal son had learned. But it says in **verse 17** that the boy finally came to his senses and decided to go home. You've been there, haven't you?

Maybe you have had to literally do this physically with your earthly father. I know you've had to do it spiritually with your Heavenly Father. You know the lump that was in his throat. You know the shame that was in his heart. You know how he must have recited his speech to his father the whole way home, right? Okay, I'm going to say this and then I'll say this and then I'll make sure he knows this thing and I need to make sure I leave that certain part out and...all the way home he prepared.

But then we read in **verse 20**, *“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.”* Have you ever seen an older man run? It’s not pretty. It’s not dignified. It might even be dangerous and if the neighbors saw him, it would be scandalous! Especially to run after a prodigal, wasteful, shameful son. That would be the scandal of the town.

But that’s just how the Heavenly Father loves us. **Psalm 103** says, *“he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.*

*¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;*

*¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

*¹³ As a father has **compassion** on his children,
so the Lord has **compassion** on those who fear him;”*

The boy tried to recite his speech he had memorized but the father didn’t give him the chance. He had compassion on his son. That word “compassion” in the Hebrew is “racham” and it means to have pity on someone dear to you who is weak or suffering. The boy had repented. He had a change of heart, had come to his senses and turned away from that lifestyle he was living and went back to his father. And his father scandalously ran toward his son and showed him compassion because he knew he was weak and suffering.

Our holy Father God sees us when we repent and turn away from that sin that we thought would bring us happiness and our Father shows us compassion in the same way and it is the scandal of the universe! He shouldn’t do it! We don’t deserve it. Not only that but we don’t deserve it the first time and we sure don’t deserve it the second time, much less the millionth time! And yet, every time we turn away from our sin and truly repent, God is right there to forgive us and show us great compassion.

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.

In another similar parable just before this one, Jesus says, *“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”* I have an idea that there are angels in Heaven that see me repent and see God forgive me and say, *“Will you look at that! I can’t believe it. He forgave him again. Are we supposed to celebrate again? He doesn’t deserve it. I wouldn’t do it. What a scandal!”*

And they are right! But I tell you what. It is the grace and mercy and forgiveness of God that makes me hate my sin all the more. It is the cross of Jesus that enables my forgiveness that makes me hate Satan all the more. And it is because of God’s compassion that my sin pains me and makes me run back to Him in all my pain, guilt and problems that I brought onto myself by my sin.

But thank you, Lord, it doesn’t have anything to do with me deserving it. It has everything to do with God’s grace and mercy and His compassion. As a believer in and follower of Jesus, you should be sinning less and less every day. It should pain you when you sin more and more. And your time away from the Father should be less and less.

Music

Do you have that relationship with Him today. Jesus said in **John 14** that He is the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father except through Him. You can’t be good enough. You can’t be smart enough. You can’t get there by what your parents did or how you grew up. In fact, that doesn’t have anything to do with it. All that matters is that you have trusted Jesus to be not just your Savior but also your Lord and whatever He says is what you do and how you believe. Does that describe you? If not, why don’t you repent and turn away from that sinful lifestyle and turn to God. He is waiting for you right now and ready to run to you and show you compassion. Do it right now as the music plays.