

The Prodigal

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Date: 30 October 2022

[0:00] The lost son or the prodigal son. The whole Bible is a love story. Two main characters.

We read tonight of a lost son, the prodigal son, as people call him. Have you ever lost something? I know, I can identify with that.

Usually Julie finds it for me. I say, I've lost something and Julie says, well, have you tried looking there? And she even knows where the lost things are. Luke 15 has been called the Bible's lost and found department.

Because we've got the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. We see tonight two scenes. Scene one, man leaving God.

We read of the loser. This is what he is, the loser, the prodigal. Man leaving God. Starting from verse 11. Luke 15 verse 11.

[1:00] And he, the Lord Jesus said, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.

And he divided unto them his living. It was arrogant, brazen, a dishonour to his father. It was tantamount to the younger man saying that he wished that his father was already dead.

He demanded the portion of goods that was due him. The share of the property. But it wasn't due then. It was due at the dying of the father, which hadn't happened yet.

Yet the father mercifully divided his possessions. He divided his wealth between them. He showed mercy to what really should have been declined and was really an inappropriate statement or request.

Verse 13. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country. And there wasted his substance with riotous living.

[2:08] So here's this younger son. The father had given a share. And he now went as far, far away as he could. A far, far away country.

And there it says he wasted his substance with riotous living. So here he is, the possessions in his hand, the wealth, the share.

And he cashed it in. And he went into a land far, far away. He wasted his wealth with riotous living. In other words, loose living.

Reckless living. Someone has said, where is the far country? Where is this place? The far country is anywhere you are outside the will of God.

The far country. It may be for you like it was for the prodigal son, deep in sexual sin, in wild living. But for most of it, it's only going to be just that.

[3:06] Any place where your life seems empty. And look up and say, is this all there is? And the father says, of course not. Come home. It's being far, far away from the father.

In other words, we could picture it as representing being one step away from the will of God. Being out of God's will. Verse 14, we read on.

And when he, the prodigal, had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land. And he began to be in want. The man had spent everything.

You know, his pockets were pulled out, nothing in his pockets. He had nothing left. And a terrible famine struck that country. It was severe. He began to be in need.

He had nothing. Nothing to eat. And the son no longer had wanted to be home. He'd wanted to go and live for the moment. He thought this was his chance to escape.

[4:03] He wanted that freedom. So he thought to live his life his own way. He wanted his share of the family wealth. And he wanted it now. He wanted to cash it in.

To treat his father as if he were dead. It's a picture of sin really, isn't it? Of that selfishness. That willfulness. He was full of his own selfish ideas.

And he wanted the bright lights. The big city. But it's not long in this account that we find that his so-called freedom gets him into big trouble.

The sinner's life brings wandering, wasting and wanting. We see the sinner's life brings wandering. He was a man.

He was wandering away from the father. As man leaves God's presence, this younger son, he goes bush. He goes walkabout. And he goes further and further away.

[5:00] He went out looking for love, looking for happiness. But he was going in the wrong direction. He was going away from the father. Here he is searching, yet going in the wrong direction.

A sinner's life is a wandering. Really an aimless wandering, isn't it? Now we see secondly that the sinner's life is wasting. He had lost everything.

When tough times come, he had nothing. He had nothing to hang on to. No one to turn to. He'd lost God's presence. Effectively, the picture there.

He'd lost the father's presence. He'd lost that peace and purpose. Sinners live a life that is a-wasting. Missing out on God's best, on God's plan.

And all he had was a great void. Really an emptiness. And then we see him, as we'll come soon, scraping the bottom of the barrel. That's sin, isn't it? A picture of it. And he had gone as low as he could.

[6:07] In the pits, the pig pen. With the pigs and the pods of the pigs. It was really a shameful thing, wasn't it? I know when Julie and I lived in Northern Territory, they had a saying, it was a shame job.

It was such a shameful thing. It's a shameful thing. A shame job. And that's what sin is, isn't it? It's a waste. It's a shameful thing. It's a reproach.

So it's a wandering. It's a wasting. It's a wanting. A sinner's life is a life of wanting. He got hungry. Hungry and yet he could not be filled. Hungering, desperate. He began to be in need.

He was impoverished. What a picture of really what sin does to us, doesn't it? A sinner would think, I've got everything, but really they have nothing. Because they're missing the point of life itself.

And here he was, this prodigal, this young man, facing starvation. Now sin can supply some of our wants, but only God can supply all of our needs.

[7:08] Only God is the true resource for what really matters, for what we really truly need. Here he was, starving hungry. Sin does not satisfy.

The Lord Jesus says, seek and you shall find. What are you searching for? I love the scripture that says, you shall find me if you'll seek for me with all your heart.

If you'll search for me with all your heart. And God is the source of all good gifts. So here he was, wandering, wasting, wanting.

That's sin. It's emptiness, isn't it? It's not satisfaction. It's missing the true fulfilment of life. The one who is the source of all that is good and right and life itself.

Verse 15 we read on. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country. And he sent him into the fields. Into his fields.

[8:07] To feed swine. Here he is, this man. Now he's got a job. He's sent to feed the pigs. Not the choicest of jobs.

He was hired. It tells us he joined himself. You could literally put that, that he glued himself. He was really stuck on this man.

He was stuck fast to him. He was joined to this man. This pig farmer. He should have been clinging to his father. But now he was clinging to this pig farmer.

And what a picture of folks today that are clinging to the wrong things, isn't it? Sin can be sticky.

Stick us onto the wrong things. We can get stuck on wickedness, on waywardness, on worldliness. We can get stuck. This sinful world.

[9:07] And it's empty and vanity. And the swallowing that he had left him really only empty and absolutely repulsive.

What a picture it was. I know you see them sometimes pictured in videos or as might be pictured in photos of a pig. They're not the choicest of animal, are they?

Often dirty. Often smelly. And he was in the pigsty with these detestable, defiled creatures. And of course the Bible describes pigs as really very gross and undesirable creatures.

Not something that's fitting, really, is it? And of course in the culture, as the Old Testament would refer to them, they were unclean, an unclean animal.

Of course they are unclean, even physically so. So you can imagine, if you could picture it or smell it, that that was the state of this man.

[10:17] It was the state of this man that he was smelling like a pig, you could say. Verse 16, it tells us, And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat.

And no man gave unto him. It's like he had this desire to fill his belly with the pig food. It's like he longed to fill his stomach with even these pods, these scraps that the pigs were eating.

But no one gave him anything. Think of it as someone has described it. Before he started eating with the pigs, he had a warm bed, a rich inheritance, a loving father, a secure future, and probably good food.

Everything that he could have wanted. But it wasn't enough. What a picture of sin, isn't it? He wanted fun. He wanted something more. He wanted to indulge himself. He wanted to run his own life and do whatever he desired.

And it resulted in him wanting to eat pig swill. He had empty pockets, an empty stomach, and an empty soul. What a picture of sin, really, isn't it?

[11:26] Emptiness, vanity. Verse 17. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my fathers have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger?

When he came to his senses, this real dramatic transformation happens right here. He came to himself. When he came to himself, or he came to his senses, the light bulb went on for him.

He remembered that which he had. I'm dying here with hunger. I'm starving to death. A change happened in his thinking, in his will.

We think of sin. Really, sin is madness. To reject God, it's folly, isn't it? To miss God, to be against God, sin.

And rejection of God is madness. It's folly. To miss God on this earth, in this lifetime, it's mentally and morally crazy.

[12:37] Truly, I put to you, when I see folk, and I know we talk sometimes when we went to sing, and you think that they won't even give it a hearing. They won't even give it an intelligent reasoning, an intelligent opening of their ears.

They won't even hear it. They're like this, aren't they? And that's the senselessness of sin. It's a kind of spiritual insanity. Turning away from God is insanity, in a way, isn't it?

You're turning away from all that is good and right, to that which is bad and rotten, that you even end up in the pig pen. You're giving up that which is worth everything, to that which is worth nothing.

And it's actually gross. You're giving up that which has eternal value, to that which has no value.

What a contrast, really. You're turning from the living water, to be drinking out of the sewer.

It's the picture of sin, isn't it? To leave the father's house, to end up in the pig pen. That is effectively what happens when you reject God.

[13:43] And so being a Christian is a sensible thing. It's coming to your senses. If you're not a Christian, you're not fully sensible. I say that respectfully tonight. That really, it's the most sensible thing, is to know him.

To know the one that's made you. To find him. To know him. And you can. And it's stepping into the new dimension, isn't it? He came to himself. It's like, well, I just realised what an idiot I am.

What a fool I am. And you start to see that everything that is happening, you see it all from a whole new perspective. So when he came to himself, when he came to his senses, he took a close look at himself and where he was at.

And the terrible condition that he was in. He thought about his father. What he had. The father of his mother, of the servants. That they had so much more.

Even the servants that would have gladly served him. And now he looked at himself in the pig pen. What a mess I'm in. What a mess I've made of it. And he was scraping the bottom of the barrel.

[14:46] He'd gone as low as he could go. Hungry even for the pig's slops. Now we've got some chooks at home and we give them the scraps. It's the rubbish.

It's that which is the leftovers. And that's what these pigs would have been eating. Just the leftovers. Just the scraps. The stuff that was not fit for human consumption.

Like they write on pet food, isn't it? That's the sense of it. That's what sin is, isn't it? It takes us to the pits. What a mess that he was in. What a terrible mistake that he had made. And guilt overwhelmed him.

And he was facing ruin and starvation now. He had hit rock bottom. What a picture of sin. Like one preacher, F.B. Myers, puts it, Sin is temporary madness. The first step to God is to come to ourselves.

He's realising, yeah, this is no way to live. The life of sin, of rejection of God, of apartness from God, this is no life.

[15:48] You come to yourself. You come to yourself. And so he thought, you could picture it, how he might have thought about perhaps his changeable friends. They'd helped him spend his money, waste his money.

He might have thought about the parties, the pleasure, the prostitutes. What a waste of time and money it all had been. And now he knew how shallow the life of sin. He decided to do something about it.

He came to himself. It's, as someone has described it, he came to himself and then he came to the Father. He came to himself first and realised his sin.

Then he came to his Father. And we think of how our soul longs for food which the world cannot supply. And he was saying, I don't have to be here.

I've got a Father. I've got a home. We could picture it for ourselves of sin. But we can actually know there is a loving God. There is a heavenly Father.

[16:49] And there is a heavenly home. We can know a heavenly relationship with God. And yet, in sin, we're missing all that. It's just vanity.

And as he came to himself, he thought about the goodness of his Father. Of what he had. And we can see how the Bible speaks about the goodness of God. The forbearance of God.

The long-suffering of God. And that the goodness of God leads us to repentance. So he came to this realisation that he was lost, you could say, in effect.

As the picture of the prodigal, pictures for us the man, coming to himself and realising his state of sin. Really, realising he's far, far away that he's doomed. That his sins are exposed.

His soul is naked. And he realises his need to go to the Father. To go to the Father. And this lost son's search for love and happiness ended back at home. That's where he should have stayed.

[17:48] He should have been there. And so we see verse 18. It reads on, I will arise and go to my Father. And will say unto my Father, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.

I will get up. He comes to this place of decision. It's been noted that literally you could say, when it says, I will get up, it's almost like to raise up from the dead.

It's almost like he had a resurrection. He said, I will get up. I will arise. As you rise from the dead. He had like a resurrection. He was dead. And now the life started to come about.

You could picture it in that sense. When you trust Christ, you go from spiritual death to spiritual life. And there's a, like a resurrection happens in effect.

So just a word picture there. And verse 19, he says, I'm no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. So here he is.

[18:49] He says, I will arise. I will go to my Father. I will say unto my Father, I'll sin against heaven and against thee. And I'm no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.

In other words, I don't deserve. I don't deserve to have your home, but I'm willing to even be a servant. I'm willing to surrender, to stop going my own selfish way. And so there's this real change of heart, of mind.

Verse 20, And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him. See, the father was looking. And it says, His father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

A wonderful picture again of God's reception of you and me that come to him. It says, And he arose and came to his father. You could put it that it was while he was coming to his father.

So he got up, he was heading to his father, heading to his father, and his father was yet a great way off. And his father, it says, was looking and saw him and the father ran and held him, embraced him, kissed him.

[20:07] It was while he was coming to his father that his father was also filled with compassion for him. And running was really something, maybe culturally, not something an older person might do.

It was kind of an unusual thing. He threw away that with kind of an abandon that he just wanted his son. He was moved with such love, with such warmth, with such grace.

And he ran to his son. You can picture that. What a beautiful picture, what a word picture it is of how the father is looking for us. He's just looking. Are you going to come?

And then as soon as he sees him, he runs and throws his arms around him and kisses him. And it's got a picture here that he embraced him.

The sense is that he ardently kissed him. So he was covering him with kisses is the sense of it. He was fervently kissing, tenderly, lovingly, fondly. And even though this man was dirty and smelling like a pig, he stunk like a pig.

[21:12] Think of that. Again, a picture of God's grace, isn't it? That God would have such a heart, a light to that loving father for his son. And God is a light to that loving father that he welcomes us with his open arms.

What a display of forgiveness. This son had really nothing to merit, nothing really desirable or worthy.

He was unfit. He caused great shame and reproach. He hurt his father. He disowned his father and yet his father still showed great love and forgiveness.

What a picture of God to us. So it's like there's this mind shift, this change of mind, of heart, of will. He repented. I will arise and go to my father.

I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I'm no more worthy to be called thy son. You can see the broken up heart of the young man. I've sinned.

[22:13] I'm no more worthy. The father was looking for his son's return. It's like God looks out for us, doesn't he? He looks for us that might be astray, that might have rejected or have not ever trusted him.

A picture of the loving, forgiving, longing father, longing for us to come to him. And he runs towards his son. Of course, in the other pictures of the lost coin and the lost sheep, the one searching is God is searching for the coin.

God is searching for the sheep. Here it's a bit different in that the father's looking, but yet he's waiting for the son to turn. And so we see God in picture form here as the saviour, longing to see us come unto him and rejoicing when we do.

So God is eager to forgive sin. And so we see in scene one, man leaving God. Now we see scene two, God loving man. Man leaving God, now God loving man.

In scene one, we saw the loser. In scene two, we see the lover. Man leaving God in scene one, man the loser. Now in scene two, God loving man, God the lover.

[23:26] We see the prodigal search for love and happiness ended right back at home. It's really a picture of, really God is the source of that which is true benefit for us.

Verse 21, And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight I'm no more worthy to be called thy son. He realised that he has nothing to merit, nothing to credit himself.

Verse 22, But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Now it's saying here, Bring out the robe, the best.

The robe was a special honour. In scripture it indicates long robes were worn by kings and priests, persons of rank and the redeemed of the Lord. The robe is a picture of this special honour.

And we see the ring, it shows commitment and belonging to the family. It represented authority and distinction, the ring. Then it shows the shoes that showed his sonship and his acceptance into the family.

[24:34] The ring and the sandals were that which pictured or showed a free man because slaves had no shoes or sandals. So there's lots of pictures here of the significance of the reception of the father.

God completely welcomes us into his household even though we don't deserve it. Someone's described it of five signs of the father's welcome. We've got the kiss, the sign of forgiveness.

The robe, the sign of honour. The ring, the sign of authority. The sandals, the sign of freedom because the slave went barefoot and the feast, the sign of joyful welcome.

Honour, authority, freedom, joyful welcome, forgiveness. See verse 23 and he says, bring here, bring here, bring here the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry.

Let's have a feast. And they called, the father called for the best calf. This one that was kept for a special occasion, the prized calf was the very best calf that they had.

[25:48] Let's have a feast. This calls for celebration. Verse 24, it reads, for this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found and they began to be merry.

He was a dead man and he's come to life. Let's rejoice. Let's have a feast. So there's great joy here, great rejoicing at the reception of the man.

Now we could reflect on this record of the prodigal and I'm quoting here, someone's put it as five steps to the pig pen.

What happened? Why did this man end up in the pig pen? Firstly, he was selfish. He had this selfish disregard of the father. I want my money and I want it now. Dad, give me my money.

He was saying, I forget about you, your family. Forget about my brother. Forget my reputation. Give me my money. I want to get out of here. It was selfish, wasn't it? The self. Another point, he acted hastily.

[26:56] When he got his money, he went into a far country and really, in other words, he was out of God's will. The picture of that. He wanted to get far, far away from the father and really, you don't have to travel far to get away from God.

You really, you can stay just where you are but it's where you're at on the inside, isn't it? Get far, far away from God. And he wasted everything that he had. The word prodigal means to waste.

And so, when he left, he never planned to come back home. He took everything. He didn't leave some money back home. He just took the whole box and dice, didn't he?

He took all the spending money he could put in his bag and he had no intention of ever going back. And he wasn't tricked into spending his money. He deliberately, intentionally spent it all.

He wasted everything he had. What a waste. Friends, the life of a sinner, the life of one outside of Christ is a waste. It's a wasted life. It's a life misspent.

[27:59] It's a lost, lost life. Another aspect is he separated himself from every relationship that was important to him. So, he broke his relationship with his father, with his brother.

He left his family, his home. He rejected everything that was right and holy. All of that went out the window. He just rejected it. He separated himself from, you could reflect our pictures, separating ourselves from God.

That's what sin does, isn't it? And then he made a long string of bad decisions. One decision, after another that was a bad one. Sin leads to more sin.

And so, he just went down, down, down, into the pig pen, into the pits. It's easy to keep going the wrong way.

That's what sin does, isn't it? Might just start with just some casual forgetting of God or some ignoring of God and then you end up smelling like a pig.

[29:01] starving hungry in a deplorable state. See the pictures here of contrast. It talks about how he's dead and then how he was alive.

It talks about how he was lost and then how he's found. It talks about the famine and then the feast. It talks about the rags and then the riches. It talks about a sinner and then a son.

Sin will leave us hungry and hurting and God wants to give us his total fulfilling love. How much does God love you? He's like the loving, forgiving father, isn't he?

He's like the one in this parable that he loves you so. He loves you enough to let you go, to let you choose your own foolish way. He loves you enough to let you hit rock bottom and he's still there.

He's still looking. Even while you're in the pig pen, he's looking. He's looking for you. He loves you enough to let you come back and he loves you so much that he will run to meet you.

[30:04] He loves you so that he will run. As that father ran and covered the son with kisses, it's a picture of how much God loves you. He didn't deserve anything from his father.

Even that he would be one of his servants, he didn't deserve anything after how he treated the father. And it's the same with ours, isn't it?

We really are unworthy, unfit. I've sinned, I'm unworthy. And yet he's so willing to receive us with love. And when a person receives salvation, there's a great joy in heaven.

What a joy, what a blessing. There's a rejoicing, there's a feast. As verse 32 talks about, he was dead and ears alive again. He was lost and is found.

Of course, we know there's a further aspect to the story in that elder brother. It was kind of hypocritical and begrudging. But just focusing on the main two characters, the father and the prodigal, we see salvation pictured here.

[31:09] The dramatic event of changing from death to life, from being lost to being found, and the joy and thrill, the rejoicing, the love of the father, the embracing of the father, the grace of the father to such an undeserving rotter, a loser, a shame, a reproach.

He's been a disgrace to the family name. Humanly, we could say he deserves nothing but condemnation. Yet, for us that believe, it's the love of the father that receives us that come unto him.

There's a glad day, rejoicing. There's angels in heaven rejoicing, joining in too. When one sinner repents, when we trust Christ, when we leave that rejection of God and find that trust in God, we find that faith, that soul-saving faith to know the Saviour and he's loving us so, so loving us as the father in this account is loving his son.

God so loves you that he would by grace save you and bless you that trust in him. Let us pray.

Lord, we thank you for the message of the prodigal that speaks to our hearts today of your love for undeserving sinners such that we can be as pictured there unworthy, disgraceful and reproach, ashamed and shameful.

Lord, that no matter how deep in sin we go, that your love extends still while we have breath to trust you, to know you, to be received by you.

[32:54] Lord, we pray we might take heart and think of those that we can reach that are still as it were in the pigsty, the pig pen, eating the slops of the pigs.

Think of loved ones, of family, of friends that are astray from you. Lord, we ask you by your tender mercy draw them unto yourself. We pray, Lord, that you would look out over the fence and be looking down the road and that one day they will come to you, they will trust you, they will run to you and you'll run to them even more so that you will have such a welcome and we thank you, thank you, Lord, for the fact that salvation is like this feast, this joyous party, this celebration, this rejoicing and even the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner that repents, Lord, that we can, we that are lost can be found, we that were dead in sin can be made alive, resurrected even such that we can trust you.

Lord, we praise you for these things. Help us to have a heart like your heart to reach those that are still lost and see them trust you, Lord, we pray.

Give us your heart and help us, Lord, to appreciate the joy of salvation, the wonder of it, the miracle of it, that such as we can be saved today by your grace through faith in Christ.

We thank you, Lord, in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.