

# The Prodigal Returns

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want us to turn back to Luke chapter 15. And I want to bring some thoughts from verses 11 through to 22, where we have an account of the parable of the prodigal son.

Now this parable brings before us the love of God as clearly as any narrative that we have in the Bible. But in order to understand it, we must consider the context in which this parable was given by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It was spoken in response to the Pharisees finding fault with Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners.

Now Jesus in all of these parables is making it clear the purpose for which God the Father sent him into this world.

That it was to seek and to find that which was lost. And he shows us the joy that it gives the inhabitants of heaven when sinners such as we are repent of our sins and embrace the opportunity of being reconciled to God.

[ 1 : 34 ] In the parable we see the long-suffering of God towards us. He puts up with our rebellion until we are brought to our senses.

And we know that the reason that we are lost to God is because we wanted to be like God.

That was the temptation that our first parents fell into. And that's always been the case ever since. It's not what his will is, it's what my will is.

I'll do my own thing. And we live in rebellion against God until we come to our senses and realize that it's foolishness.

And not only is it foolishness but it's sinfulness to be living in rebellion against God and seeking our own will rather than his will.

[ 2 : 37 ] Now in the parable we see the ungratefulness of the younger son and how he wished not to be under authority to his father.

And he sought to cast off that authority that his father exercised over him. In short, he wanted to be his own master.

He wanted to do his own thing. Now in the parable the father obviously represents God to us. And the rule of God is a spiritual rule.

And the desire to escape that spiritual rule is wholly unjustifiable. It is as a result of our desire to satisfy our own lusts that we live in rebellion against God.

And we prefer to satisfy these lusts than endeavor to give obedience to God. We defy his prohibitions.

[ 3 : 55 ] And these things obviously prevent us from experiencing the blessing of God if we were living in harmony with him.

Because it's subjection to God's will that's going to bring us into a place of safety, a place where we will experience peace, a place where we will experience true joy.

And when we continue to live in rebellion against God's will, then it's going to bring us nothing but woe and desolation.

Now if we interpret the parable according to these principles, we may say that the fall of the younger son fell as soon as he started to insist on his own rights.

When he separated his interests from the father's interests. When he started to desire to gratify his own desires, he started to manifest his moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

[ 5 : 24 ] It wasn't when he was in the far country spending his money on why it is living that he became estranged from God.

It was when that first desire came into his heart while he was still in the father's house. And he was just as guilty when the desire took a hold of his heart as he was when he went on to live out these

sinful practices and when he found himself in the far country.

He was just as guilty whilst he was entertaining these thoughts in his heart whilst he still lived in the father's house as he was when he was practicing them.

Now we have here a picture of people who are brought up in the church of God. We have in the younger son a picture of those who rebel against their upbringing.

But we have in the older son which we are not going to look at today but just in the passing to mention that he is a picture of the Pharisees that he was addressing this parable to particularly.

[ 6 : 57 ] People who didn't go out and live a riotous life. People who respected the upbringing that they had and have lived a moral and an upright life and have never done anything that anyone can find any fault with outwardly.

But I would suggest to you that the older son was just as far away from God as the younger son was. And if we were to consider the latter half of the parable that would become evident.

Just because you are sitting here in church this morning doesn't mean to say that you are near to God or that you are rejoicing in the fact that you are sitting in church.

Maybe you are sitting in church out of habit. And maybe you are living a moral and upright life because you believe that it is your duty to do so which is commendable.

But as you sit in church you find no pleasure in sitting in church other than that it appeases your conscience and other than that as far as people can tell from looking at your outward life you are living a moral and upright life.

[ 8 : 20 ] But your heart might as well be in the far country because you are just as far away from God as the one who has rebelled obviously and his right is living against God.

But the person who is here in the right spirit is the person who wants to be here and the person who rejoices in worshipping God because they have a desire to worship God.

It is not because you have to be in church that you are in church. It is because you want to be in church. Because you want to worship the God that you have entered into a relationship with.

And it gives you great joy and not only does it give you great joy but it gives the inhabitants of heaven great joy because you have joined with them in their worship around the throne in giving the glory to God that God deserves to receive.

But coming back to the prodigal son the prodigal son is obviously a sinner it is manifested in his life.

[ 9 : 35 ] His disobedience to the father's authority makes it clear that he is a sinner. Now the essence of sin is that we become self-centered.

when we are living to gratify our own desires. It is not God's will that we desire to do it is my will.

Now the prodigal is presented to us by Jesus as a waster. because that is what the meaning of prodigal is waster.

The younger son is a typical sinner. He is a waster. He is seen as a waster. Everybody looking at his life can see that he is a waster.

And that is what we read concerning him in verse 13 that he wasted his possessions in reckless living.

[ 10 : 58 ] He lives recklessly. He begins by asking his father for a share of his goods.

and he gets it so that he might satisfy his own sinful lusts and desires. And that is what the older brother later accuses him of.

He has devoured or he has wasted your livelihood. When you say surely there are worse sins than our prodigalness.

Well not if we understand it as we should. Because nothing is worse than the resolution to indulge ourselves at whatever cost.

Regardless of how it is going to affect other people. Regardless of the great waste to ourselves and to other people.

[ 12 : 08 ] Regardless of the voice of conscience telling us this isn't how you should be living your life. Regardless of what the word of God that we remember from time to time warning us that if we continue in rebellion against God's law that we are bound to bring unhappiness and ultimately destruction upon ourselves.

Now it is not without reason that Jesus lays stress on the prodigalness of the younger son because it is the essence of sin.

The determination to indulge ourselves in spite of what our conscience may be speaking to us. And it puts us further and further away from God.

And it is our self centredness that is the root of all of our sins. Rather than be God centred we have become self centred.

And therefore it is that all saving religion begins with breaking down our stubborn wills.

[ 13 : 45 ] The psalmist refers to the power of God making us willing in a day of his power. God that is the beginning of us being reconciled to God when our stubborn wills are being broken down.

Now Jesus presents the younger son here as a typical sinner. One who wanted his will to be done and not God's will.

I will not have him to rule over us. That is what crucified Jesus. That is what they cried out at the cross. We will not have him to rule over us.

And for as long as we live without Christ in our lives that is what in essence we are saying to God. We will not have him to rule over us.

Crucify him. Because that is what we are doing in our hearts. We are crucifying God's desire to rule over us. So that his will would be done and not our will because his will for our lives are far better for us than our will.

[ 15 : 03 ] Although we would not readily acknowledge that until we are made wise to that fact. We are crucifying Christ in our hearts.

For as long as we are living in disobedience, obedience to God because God's will is that you accept him whom he has sent.

That is the whole work of God for your lives. That you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and as your King so that he might give you a new direction in your lives.

God's sin. So Jesus presents to us the younger son as a typical sinner.

And that should fill us with sympathy and with terror. God's God. Why? Because he is so like many of our selves who wasted so much of what God was pleased to bestow upon us, our talents, all the gifts that God gives us, our opportunities, all the possessions that we possess.

[ 16 : 27 ] These are all things that God has graciously bestowed upon us because we were wanting these things. And he gave us these things. And what did we do with them?

We wasted them. We wasted our gifts and our talents and our possessions. And we wasted them on ourselves to gratify our own desires and our own lusts.

Well, let's look at the younger son as he becomes penitent.

And we see him as a model penitent. And we learn from him the attitude that we ought to adopt towards God and the words that would be appropriate for us to address God as we seek to come back to him.

As we return to our heavenly father, we notice that it was the sting of hunger that first struck the penitent soul.

[ 17 : 43 ] it was the sting of hunger that brought him to himself. It was the sting of hunger that gave him the desire to return to the father's house.

Because when we come to realize our spiritual hunger and our spiritual thirst, in other words, the emptiness of our lives, that's when we come to our senses.

And that's when we have the desire to come back to God and return to the fold so that we might experience God's rich blessings that will satisfy that hunger that we've become aware of and that thirst that we cannot quench with the drink.

We cannot quench with drugs. We cannot quench with riotous living in all of its forms. Because this world cannot give us anything that will quench this thirst.

And we go to all the broken cisterns that the world can throw at us. And we find no real lasting satisfaction.

[ 19 : 08 ] Nothing is going to satisfy this hunger and this thirst that we're beginning to experience in our souls until we come back to God.

Because only he can satisfy this thirst and this hunger. It's a spiritual thirst. It's a spiritual hunger.

And when we realize that we've got a problem, that's the first step to recovery. In whatever situation. Once we acknowledge we've got a problem, and once we realize that we cannot continue living this way, that's the first step to recovery.

Now, we cannot find a better pattern than the one that we have here, of the penitent prodigal, when he seeks to come back to the Father's house.

Because we have words that will express how we feel. and we have an attitude that expresses the way that we should conduct ourselves.

[ 20 : 36 ] First of all, we see that he confesses that he is unworthy. I am no more worthy to be called your son.

Make me as one of your servants. He finds himself unworthy because he knows that he has sinned. And he doesn't try to make the excuse that it was others that made him sin.

No, I'm sure that he had plenty of companions as he lived his riotous life that enticed him and encouraged him to commit the sins that he was committing.

But he doesn't point the finger at any of them. he faces up to his responsibility, it was me that sinned.

And I've sinned against God. Against you, you only have I sinned. And that's what we've got to realize, that it doesn't matter what influence others may have played in the sins that we've committed.

[ 21 : 48 ] They didn't force us to commit any of them. it was us that willingly committed them. And we have to acknowledge that they're our sins and that they're directed against God.

And you say, well, they might not have been against God, maybe we've sinned against other people. people, yes, but if you kept God's law, you would never sin against other people. First and foremost, you're sinning against God in whatever sins you commit.

And as a result of sinning against God, other people have suffered the consequences. And he acknowledges that he is no longer worthy to be called his son.

he faces up to his guilt. And that's one of the first marks of true penitence. It's a bad sign when we try to justify ourselves, although we're acknowledging that we have gone wrong, but it was because of our circumstances or it was because of the influence that others brought to bear upon us.

No, face up to it. that's what we've got to do. We've got to realize, I've sinned. I've done wrong.

[ 23 : 11 ] And I've sinned against God. Against you, you only, have I sinned. The next mark that we see here in verse 18, when he says that I will arise and go to my father's house and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

He sees himself as the chief of sinners. Now, it's easy for us to say that we're the chief of sinners, but it's another thing to experience to experience it.

Because when we experience a sense of our sinfulness, we will be filled with a sense of shame.

And when we approach God, it's with this sense of shame.

That's what we understand from what he says there, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm ashamed of myself. That I've sinned against heaven.

That I've sinned against God. Because he realizes who it is that he sinned against.

[ 24 : 44 ] he's beginning to realize, I'm the chief of sinners. Nobody would treat God the way I've treated him. And not only is he filled with a sense of shame when he acknowledges his guilt before God and when he approaches God, but when he approaches his fellow human beings, as Paul tells us, he esteems others better than himself.

He sees nobody's done what I've done. Nobody's more unworthy than I am. And he sees other people better than himself.

So it's not just a case of saying we're the chief of sinners, it's to experience it and to sense the shame that that brings into our experience that we have sinned against heaven and not only have we sinned against heaven but that we've sinned against our fellow human beings.

sinned against sinned against sinned against God. And that's the spirit in which he approaches God. And the third mark that we see is that he desires now to be subject to authority.

He doesn't just want forgiveness of sins so that he can continue living in different sins. That's why some people want forgiveness of sins.

[ 26 : 25 ] It's to give them liberty to continue living their lives as they are. That's not the terms on which God is going to forgive any of us. If he forgives us for our sins it's so that we will stop living our lives the way that we are and that we start living the life that he wants us to live.

We're coming under his authority. We're no longer exercising our own authority. We're asking what will you have me to do? Not what I want to do.

And we approach him in prayer not insisting this is what I want, this is what you must give me.

We're coming to him asking what will you have me to do?

What do you want? And that's how he comes back. He's wanting to make him like one of his hired servants to come under the authority of his father.

And notice he leaves the house as a son but he wants to come back as a servant. As one who's willing to submit to the authority of the head of the house.

[ 27 : 38 ] That's what the psalmist wanted in Psalm 84. He would prefer to be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to continue living his life in sin. That was far more of a privilege to be a servant than to continue living as he was.

Redemption begins with subjection. Subjection to the father's will.

That's what Jesus teaches us. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's the desire of the person who repents of his sin and wants to come back to God.

That his will would be done. The son was lost when he insisted on his own rights and he was found when he realized that he had absolutely no rights and wanted God's rights to be done.

He was lost when he fled from his father's authority and he was found when he wanted that the father would have full authority over his life from there on in.

[ 29 : 11 ] He was willing to become a servant. Now by all of these marks humbly confessing his guilt and seeking to come back filled with a sense of shame and desiring that God would have the rule over the rest of his life.

It's the sign of true repentance of somebody that's really come to a realization of his own lostness whilst he's living without God.

And that's the point that we must all come to. And not only must we come to that point but that's the point from which we ought to live the rest of our lives.

It's not a one-off thing. It's an ongoing thing. Salvation is not something that happens for a brief moment. Salvation is something that will take place for the rest of your lives.

And that's what the prodigal son received. He came back wanting to be as a servant but that's not how the father treated him. The father wanted him to be restored to sonship.

[ 30 : 45 ] He was dead but now he's alive again and there is great rejoicing. The father wasn't going to be content to have him as a servant.

He was going to treat him as a son because he loved him. Regardless of what he did he was still his son.

And he wanted that he would be treated. And we'll look at that more fully this evening because that's what I want to look at in the evening service.

The way that the father treated him when he did return to him. But for the moment we see that he has turned.

That he has repented of his sins. that he has come to realize that living without God in his life that he's living an empty life spiritually bankrupt spiritually hungry spiritually thirsty and he's willing to allow God to take over the rest of his life because he has come to realize that God has a far better plan for our lives than we had for ourselves.

[ 32 : 18 ] May the Lord grant that if we haven't arrived at that situation that we would arrive at it soon and especially before we leave this world rebellion then we will suffer the consequences for all of eternity.

Let's bow our heads in prayer.