

Pr Mark Turner: The Prodigal Son (25/5/19)

Introduction:

Today is a very special day for one of the lovely ladies in our congregation. Marguerite has decided to make a public commitment to go all in in following Christ through baptism. Before we do that though, we are going to spend a few moments considering a story that Jesus told about how he feels when someone returns to following him.

Luke 15:1,2

In Luke 15 we read that those who were outcasts in society felt safe with Jesus. This familiarity of Jesus with the outcasts offended the Scribes and Pharisees. It is in this context that Jesus tells the parable.

Luke 15:3

The parable that we will be looking at today is the third in a series of parables.

1. The Lost Sheep - The sheep is lost in its stupidity.
2. The Lost Coin - The coin is lost in its ignorance.
3. The Lost Son - The son is lost in his rebellion.

Contempt - Luke 15:11

This is the story of a landholder who had two sons. The landholder was a wealthy man who had worked hard to provide a stable life for his boys and an inheritance that would one day set them up for success.

One of the sons, however, was discontented with all of his privileges and had contempt toward his good father - in spite of the fact that he had everything he needed in a good household.

So, wanting to go off and do his own thing, he asks his father for his share in the inheritance. Think about that for a moment... The son is, in effect, saying to his father that he wants him dead so that he can move on with his own life aspirations.

Now, at this point in Jesus' story, the Pharisees would have been expecting the father to rebuke his rebellious son - but he didn't.

The father instead chose to be gracious to his son and give him what he requested. (In Jewish culture, this would have normally meant having a funeral for the son, because he was as good as dead to the family).

Then, the story continues, the son went away and wasted his inheritance on reckless living - in total disregard of his family, his inheritance, and his God. Along the way he secured some friends, by virtue of his wealth, but when the money ran out he was left with nothing. He even ended up living and working with pigs to stay alive!

For a respectable Jewish boy, it doesn't get much worse than this - he is friendless and in the pig pen.

He is left hopeless. He has brought shame to his name, to his family, and to his God.

Contrition - Luke 15:17-19

Then, the story tells us, that he 'came to himself.' When the son came to the realisation of his situation, he realised that he would be better off as a hired servant with his father than where he was now.

So, in humility and contrition, he decided that he would return to his father, apologise for what he had done and then beg him to allow him to work as a hired hand. He was hoping that his father would be good enough and compassionate enough to allow him to work his way back into the family. Pay off his debts to them - so to speak.

He realises that this is his only hope! He cannot survive where he is. His father's mercy is the only hope left to him. So he returns, in total dependence upon the father.

Compassion - Luke 15:20

On returning to his father, the son is surprised to see that his father was glad to see him, and, having compassion on him, ran to meet him, embracing him as his returning *son*!

There is no contempt or contrition in the father - only compassion!

Again, the Pharisees, would have been listening to this part of the story and hoping that the father would at last require justice of this rebellious son for the disrespect he had shown to his father. But again, they were wrong! This father was not like them. He was characterised only by his mercy and love - treating him as a son that had gone away.

The father now organises a celebration of the return of his son and gives him the best that he had. He is welcomed home as a son and returned to his former place in the family.

Conclusion:

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Luke 15:7

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10

The heart of God goes out to those who have gone astray.

However, in the parable, these are not the only people that Jesus has in mind, He is also talking about the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." He was appealing to them to believe in a better picture of God.

A God who is longing to be with us. A God who sees our pain, our brokenness, our estrangement, and wants to bring us close to Himself.

He is waiting with open arms to receive us! Will you come to Him?