

ADULT EDUCATION CLASSES, VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH, GORDON KEMBLE
Parables Lesson 3: What is God like? He actively seeks the lost.

INTRODUCING YOUR GOD--What is He like?

"This man receives sinners"--Luke 15:2

Introduction:

There are two parables that Jesus told that have become part of the literature that is well known throughout the world. They are "The Good Samaritan," and "The Prodigal Son." Knowing these two stories has become part of being considered literate, even in our secular society. Charles Dickens called *The Prodigal Son*, "The finest short story ever written."

It has everything: character development, antagonist, protagonist, action, conflict, plot, climax and moral. It includes money, rebellion, debauchery, repentance, forgiveness, restoration, sibling rivalry, and a happy ending.

This story has a message for people running away from God or for children rebelling in God's family, but more than that, it speaks to everyone. It introduces us to the heart of God.

Review:

Remember that this is one part of a parable told by Jesus that deals with criticism of His interaction with sinners. The Pharisees, and Scribes have to ask the question, "How could one supposed to be a Rabbi or perhaps even the Messiah be involved with the outcasts, the rebels, the losers, the sinners?"

Jesus' answer is clear, "I not only receive and eat with sinners . . . I actually seek them out:

Like a shepherd seeking a lost, wandering foolish sheep

Like a woman seeking a carelessly lost possession of value

Like a father standing on a hill longing to see the son who ran off

I ACTUALLY INITIATE AN ALL OUT SEARCH

Today we will deal with the third part of this trilogy parable:

READ LUKE 15:11-32

THE THIRD VIEW: THE LOVING FATHER

Background:

To fully understand this episode we need to understand two Jewish principles or laws. **Read Deuteronomy 21:17-21**

1. The Jewish Law of Inheritance

- a. The first-born son was to receive a double portion--2/3 of estate
- b. The younger son or sons got what was left--1/3 of the estate
- c. The father, though not bound to, often presented these gifts to his children along with his special blessing before he died.

This seems to be what happened since in verse 12 it states,
" . . . he divided his wealth between them."

2. The Jewish Law of Father's Rights

- a. The first-born's inheritance was sacrosanct. It was all his money.
- b. The younger son(s) were bound to support their father, the rest of the family, and the servants from their one third.
- c. This was a serious duty and failure to carry it out could bring flogging, social & religious expulsion or even stoning for disrespect.

This certainly adds to the seriousness of what the younger son did gives insight into the father's grace and explains the oldest son's reaction.

I. REBELLION Luke 15:11-19

A. Sick of Home (11-13a)

1. "Father give me" (v. 12) This is a strong statement of self-will.

He is a typical teen boy. "Get me out of here; I want to be free; I can do it myself; Its to restricted here; Its better out there."

"Home was irksome; its freedom carried with it restraints. The boy craved freedom without restraints. The tediousness of a dull older brother and loving rule of his father bothered him. Life beckoned with the primeval lie. The delusion that we can destroy laws by denying them.

A man can demonstrate his freedom by jumping from a twenty-story building onto the concrete below. But the law of gravity is not destroyed; the man is destroyed. True physical freedom is always within limits: 'Which one of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his stature?'" (Matt. 6:27)

2. With this act of will he loses all his father's hopes for him.

His father releases him but knows his son is losing his family, home, servants, guidance, position, respect, riches, independence, true freedom. He is, in effect, losing everything.

B. Sick in Sin (13b-16)

1. Augustine said, "*A far country is anywhere we go to try to forget God.*"

The NASB uses the words "*loose living*," the NIV says, "*wild living*," the KJV uses "*riotous living*." All try to convey what the boy did when he left home.

The best sense of the words is "extravagantly wasteful" and implies that he did all he could to fulfill all of his sensual desires.

This is much like the Solomon of Ecclesiastes who with unlimited power and financial resources sought to find some kind of happiness and fulfillment and found nothing but vapor.

And don't forget, he also abandoned his obligations to his father and family by totally wasting his entire fortune.

2. And when he was broke, friendless, and starving he looks back:
He wanted freedom--he is a humiliated slave of a Gentile
He wanted fun and friends--he is miserable and lonely
He wanted to taste forbidden fruit--he is tasting dirt

Just how bad off is he?

Imagine a Jewish boy from a good family forced, not only to serve as an unpaid laborer for a Gentile, but to feed unclean swine. And he was so hungry he would have eaten the carob pods he was feeding the pigs, but he wasn't even allowed to do that. "*No one was giving anything to him.*"

C. Homesick (17-20a)

1. *"When he came to his senses."*

The Greek phrase used here is powerful. It means, "when he returned from madness to sound thinking or sanity."

Listen to his new found voice of reason: *"my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger."*

Today we would call that critical thinking.

Rebellion against the father is madness

Repentance and return to the father is sanity.

2. Proof of true repentance is always humility.

He will return to his father and ask, not to be restored to his place of son, but to be made a *misthios*--a day laborer with no rights, no privileges, just working hard day-to-day to be fed at the whim of his master.

This is a powerful message, but its not even the point of the story.

II. RESTORATION Luke 15:20-24

If you take this part of the parable in context, you must admit that the central-figure is not the prodigal son, but the gracious and loving father. The story is really Jesus' picture of God's heart.

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

A. Waiting (20)

1. It was not an accident that the father saw his son *"while he was still a long way off."* He was there everyday, waiting, looking, longing that his son return.

He *"felt compassion for him"* because it was his deepest desire to have a renewed relationship with him.

He *"ran, embraced him and kissed him."* Doing what no dignified Jewish father would do, he removes the any barrier there might have been with a public display of emotion.

2. Is this a true picture of God? Consider:

Luke 19:10 *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

II Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slow about His promise (the promise of His coming), as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."*

B. Loving (20-24)

1. The father initiates his desire for a renewed relationship. He brushes aside his son's planned speech and begins the process of restoration:

The best robe--a sign of high honor, position and equality
Sandals--an indication of the position of a free man not slave
A feast--a public acknowledgement of acceptance and respect

2. Is this a true picture of God? Consider:
Luke 24:46-47 " . . . That the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, . . ."
I Peter 5:6 *"Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."*

C. Forgiving (22)

I bet you thought I forgot the ring.

1. The signet ring was the seal of legal family authority.

With that ring the son could legally buy and sell, trade and barter, sign deals and commit to debt. In effect, he could blow another piece of the family fortune all over again.

What does this say about the father's forgiveness? That it is complete. All trust is restored and all is forgiven.

2. Is this a true picture of God? Consider:
Psalm 103:12 *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."*
Look at the woman caught in the act of adultery--*"neither do I condemn you, go and don't sin anymore."* What about Peter who denied Jesus--*"feed my sheep."*

The ultimate answer is in Romans 8:33--*"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; (makes it just as if we never sinned)"*

So far, so good! We have looked at the rebel son and the gracious father, but now, just when most people stop reading, the plot thickens. PERHAPS WE'RE STILL MISSING THE POINT!

Most of Jesus' listeners, both then and now are slow to identify.

Most are not rebels, outwardly running from God.

Most are not pretending to have mastered the father's agape love. But many will be able to identify with BIG BROTHER as he exhibits the hardest sin for non-believers or believers to conquer . . . the sin of pride.

READ LUKE 15:25-32

III. REACTION Luke 15:25-32

Who hasn't wished the parable would end with a happy home. The older brother doesn't let us off so easily. He compels us to recognize our sin. Jesus doesn't begin to suggest that we exonerate the younger son but He does suggest that jealousy and a critical spirit be equally as baneful.

A. Sick at Home (25-28)

1. He was a "good" boy.

He was responsible. He stayed home and worked the farm. He protected the family investments, didn't waste money, or party, or ask for much.

Of course he couldn't condone the squandering of a third of the family estate with prostitutes and pleasure. Neither did his father. There is no doubt he was the good son.

2. He had a "bad" side. (A character flaw.)

Speaking about a character in one of his books, Mark Twain once wrote, "He was a good man, in the very worst sense of the word." That was the oldest son.

He is unable to understand his father's heart and share his joy at the fact his brother had "come to himself" and returned home.

He is much like the Pharesees in the audience who pray, *"I thank God I am not like other men."* He stays outside and simmers.

B. Sick in Sin (29-30)

1. He was a lot like his brother. Don't you just hate it when that happens?

Just like his brother he forgot that everything really belonged to his dad. To the sons it was a trust, a stewardship. He was not thankful for his position of blessing. He wanted to protect what he considered his. Losing any of it to his brother would be more than he could stand.

2. He had a pride problem.

I've been faithful, I've served, I've never neglected, I've always obeyed, and what did I ever get? You never threw a party for me!

And so we are thrown back to the main point of the parable. It's not about the rebellious son, or the self-righteous son.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FATHER

C. HOME SICK (31-32)

There was something about his home, his family, his father that he just didn't understand.

1. He didn't understand his true position.

His father responds to his diatribe, *"My child (Greek = my dear, dear child) you have always been with me and all that I have is yours."*

Which is the wayward son now?

Just listen to the son who was lost and is back at home:

Self-evaluation--"I was wrong"

Decision--"I will go back"

Action--He went back "Let me be a servant"

Attitude--"I have sinned, forgive me"

Now, listen to the one at home who is lost:

Self-evaluation--"I'm wonderful"

Decision--"I have no part in the restoration"
Action--"I will not join the party"
Attitude--He would have preferred his brother not return

But, worst of all . . .

2. He didn't understand his father's heart.

The father's love was always poured out on those at home. They had all the benefits of everything he had everyday. But his brother had been lost to them, dead to them relationally and now he was home. That called for a party. (Even angels rejoice)

IV. RESPONSE

A. How can God unconditionally accept the rebel?

1. Is there no retribution? Not from God to the repentant.
Remember however, natural consequences often stay in effect
2. Is there no reward for the righteous? There is the joy of being with the Father and sharing all that He is and has
3. Is it possible to leave the father without rebelling? We leave the Father by not sharing His heart and not understanding His grace is a free and undeserved gift.

B. How can we share the heart of God?

1. We can share His longing to find the lost.
2. We can share his joy when a person repents and comes to Him
3. We can share His willingness to accept a repentant rebel unconditionally.