

**LUKE 15:11-32 11-11-12**  
**The Parable of the Prodigal pt.1**  
***Rejection of the Father***

Luke 15:11-32

*And He said, "A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. <sup>13</sup> And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. <sup>14</sup> Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup> And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' <sup>20</sup> So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; <sup>23</sup> and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; <sup>30</sup> but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' <sup>31</sup> And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"*

This magnificent story told by our Lord is the third and longest of three parables given to us in this chapter. All three are about lost things - the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. All three also make the same basic point about the compassion of the Lord upon lost sinners. The parable before us has become the pattern for many, many stories and books and plays. The dramatic elements of it are brilliant. So, it would not be difficult to turn this into a theatrical production. Such a play would have three Acts. Act I - the prodigal's rejection of the father, his departure. Act 2 - the prodigal's return to the Father. Act 3 - the prodigal's reception by the Father.

Let's get to it 11-12 "A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. Since this is a very short story we don't find here much detail. A good bit is left up to the imagination of the reader. All we learn at the beginning is that this younger son made a strange request, what strikes us as an

incredibly brash request. He wanted his share of the estate and he wanted it now. Why do you suppose he wanted that? We don't have to stretch our imagination very far to answer that one do we? When we read what the boy actually did with the money we know why he requested it. He had two desires, two urges that were moving him to this. He was after independence and excitement. Independence and excitement, the twin longings of so many. The young prodigal had a longing to leave the nest, to test his wings, to prove to himself and others that he did not need anybody. But even more than that, he wanted to get out from under the eye of Mom and Dad. He wanted to throw off the restraints of morality that had been imposed upon him. John R. Dewitt writes this: *He has declared that what matters is his freedom, his liberty to do what he pleases, so long as he derives satisfaction for himself. He believes that he knows best what he ought to do, that no power external to himself has the prerogative of laying down lines of conduct to guide his behavior. He is a free moral agent, and has the "right," the sovereign, untrammelled right to do as he will. (Prodigal pg.28)* What the boy is doing here is issuing his own declaration of independence. What he is, is a representative of man in his relationship to God. Proud rebel sinners that we are naturally resist any form of authority. We lust after a type of freedom that lets us do as we please without any accountability to anybody. You know what that is like don't you? To wish that you had to answer to no one so you could do as you please, say what you please, eat, drink and smoke what you please. The French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre said, *There can be no God because if God exists then man is not truly free.* Again he uses the term *free* to refer to a state of moral irresponsibility. To Sartre, the idea that I have to answer to God for my behavior was unbearable, so he chose to forget God as best he could. It is again an assertion of independence, of autonomy, it is the cry of the Jews who said of Jesus that *we will not have this man to rule over us.* All of us have said in some way or another, *I will be my own God. I will answer to me alone.* That is what we think we would like.

For the prodigal this attitude expressed itself by his leaving home. And where did he go? The story does not tell us whether he went east, west, north or south. The direction really does not matter, what counts is that he went **far** from home. I remember my senior year in high school when we were fond of talking about what we were going to do the next year, where we would go to college I was struck by how many of my friends said that they just wanted to get out of our hometown of Ocala. Several said they wanted to get way far away from Ocala. They looked forward to college because they were highly fond of academic disciplines right? Forget that, they wanted to get away from Mom and Dad and uncles and aunts. They wanted to go someplace they would not be known. I remember thinking that the only thing you could really do better away from

your home town than in it is sin. But, of course, that is exactly what they wanted to do. When you are at home you can't go to just any old movie; you might see someone you know. You might see someone from your church. Someone might recognize your car and tell your folks. So you go to the far country where you won't get caught, where no one will know. There you can make your own life, your way. And at least you can feel independent. Now I said *feel* independent. You won't actually be that. So much of who we are in our sin, is reflected by the teenage girl who screams at her mother and says, *I hate your guts and hope you die. But first, can you take me and Ashley to the mall.* We want to be independent but we aren't. Human beings are, by the nature of the case, utterly dependent on God. He holds your life in His hand. So, whatever autonomy or self sufficiency you have is only one of perception, not reality. The prodigal felt that once he had obtained his inheritance he was independent and it was his right to do with it as he pleased. This is precisely why he asked for it from his father. He could have stayed with his Dad and enjoyed the benefits of his family's wealth but that didn't satisfy. This is a disquieting element of human nature – this insatiable quest for personal autonomy which distorts our perspective on our stuff and makes us believe that it is ours and therefore can be used in any way we please.

Again I quote DeWitt, speaking of the prodigal's inheritance:

*Ultimately it did not belong to him. He could not claim the right to dispose of it according to his own whim and desire. The father lived still. And the substance, the wealth and possessions he had successfully demanded, all that he had was the father's, not the prodigal son's. Hence, whatever use he made of it, however he spent it, wherever he squandered it, even in the far country, for all that he was accountable to the one to whom it continued to belong. There is here a very disquieting truth, and one which we cannot allow to escape us. For the whole history of man apart from God, alienated from Him, has been in great measure an attempt to forget that he is not his own, that he belongs to the Creator, and that, whatever he has and whatever he is, even whatever he may hope to become, he is not a free agent answerable to no one but himself, but ultimately and finally to God.*

Men and women have an incredible ability to forget that all we have and all we are was given to us by God, that we ultimately own nothing, but are stewards, caretakers of God's gifts, and therefore responsible to Him. You can see how young kids do this. Give a five-year old a set of toys and then watch how possessive he can be with those things. If he doesn't want to let Johnny play with his toys he doesn't have to and Mommy can't tell him otherwise because those toys are "MINE." Never mind that the child is totally dependent on those parents. Never mind that Mommy is the one who gave the toys in the first place. We have a way of claiming things as our own that clearly come from our folks. The child talks about *my* toy, *my* hamburger, *my* bike, and someday it is *my* car. And they say *my* in such a way that it also communicates *butt out of my business*. I remember

seeing an episode of the Cosby show when one of their daughter's – Vanessa - was having a hard time at school because certain kids were picking on her for being rich. She was complaining to her father about how hard it was on her to be rich and Dr. Huxtable stopped her and said, "Wait a minute. You don't understand something. You aren't rich. Your mother and I are rich. You own nothing." That is a good point, but one that sinners too easily forget in their proud pursuit of independence. One thing I hope our parents are teaching and modeling in our homes is that attitude of gratitude – this recognition that what we have comes entirely from unmerited favor with God who is our Provider and the One whom we thank with frequency.

I said the other thing the prodigal was after was excitement. Do you get that? He was looking for adventure and thrills in the far country. There is a thirst for that kind of thing in most all of us. Really, the prodigal just wanted to be happy and fulfilled. He figured that would come with the riotous living of the far country, and he also figured something else that is important to see. He figured that Dad either did not know what would make the boy happy or else did not care. There is in every prodigal son and every sinner a distrust of the Father. Think about that. Is that not true of you, of me, of the rebellious teen? That teenager thinks Mom or Dad doesn't know what they are talking about. Or, even worse, they think mom or Dad is trying to keep them from the good life. Kids seem to be born with a basic trust of their parents but it can gradually erode. I remember the first time our Sarah ever had ice cream and boy did she get excited. She was wondering "where has this stuff been all my life?" And I felt like she was looking at me wondering why I had been keeping this good thing from her. As kids get older, they start to wonder if Dad really has my best interest in mind. When they hit adolescence they may start to doubt your understanding and they begin to think others know more about the good life than you do. Advertisements bombard young people with exciting tales of what can be found in the far country, away from the folks. I see this happening on a human level with our earthly parents, and maybe it is the case that your parents are ignorant of what will lead to your happiness, but our heavenly father certainly is not ignorant. He loves us and knows what is best for us. So, listen to me now, child of God-- if you can't ask the Father for it, it is no good! ® Trust Him to give you what is in your best interest.

And then be content with what he gives you. Hard times for the prodigal began with him becoming dissatisfied with the Father and the Father's house. He felt that he was missing out where he was. You see, what I am addressing right now is at the very root of our sinfulness. Distrust and discontentment. When the devil came to Eve in the garden he came at her on two tracks. First of all he sought to make her discontent. He said, *Eve, is it true that God won't let you eat from this beautiful tree?* Surrounded by the beauty and splendor of the garden, with all of its good things, the

devil points her eye away from all the things God has given to the one thing He withheld. He implies that somehow Eve is being deprived by God. And you watch yourself in this way. See if it doesn't happen with you in precisely the same way. You quit being grateful for all that God has given you and you set your lustful eyes on some forbidden fruit. That is how the serpent works. He sows the seed of discontentment. And then he sows the seed of distrust. He says to Eve, "*God told you you would die if you ate from that tree? Come on Eve, you surely shall not die. God just told you not to do that because he knows that if you do you will become like Him and mean ole God doesn't want that for you.*" And when you buy that lie from the pit you take steps toward independence from this cruel God or from the Father who does not know best and you decide to start looking for the good life in your own way. That is what is behind the request of the prodigal for his inheritance. That is his motive, the longing for independence and excitement rooted in a distrust of the father and a discontentment with His house. You can contrast this disposition with that of the psalmist, who said in Psalm 27:**4** *One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.*

For the prodigal, this meant he rejected his father by getting all he could and then leaving home. One of the things that makes this story so powerful is that almost everyone can relate to somebody. You can feel what the prodigal felt or what the older son felt or maybe what the Father felt. How would you feel as the Father to be rejected by your son? Make no mistake about it here -- that is what is happening. When the boy asks for his money, that is tantamount to wishing his father were dead. This is an insult to his father of the highest order. And the boy gives no consideration as to what this will do to his parents. It would be easy for this Father to strike back at his boy and tell him what a no-good sorry son he is. It would be very possible that the Father would send the boy out of the house without a thing. But instead, the Father gives him what he requested. It is very clear from our story and even more clear if you know whom the Father represents that this was a good father. If we were dealing here with a father who was cruel or harsh, or one who did not provide for his family you could better understand the boy's desire to leave. But we have here a loving father who was generous with his kids. You know that if he took good care of servants, as the story says, that he took even better care of his family. But despite this, the son rebels and hurts his father. Mark Twain said that *if you feed a dog he won't bite you. This is not however true of a man and therein lies the principle difference between the two.* ® That is really good because you know it is so true. What makes sin so terrible is that it is against a loving God. We bite the hand that feeds us and we break the heart that loves us. Some of you parents have gone thru this with your children. All parents experience it to some degree. Don't you think that the parents are to

blame for the rebellion of children. Yes, there is often a connection. Yes, bad parents drive kids to rebel but it is not therefore true that good parents only have sweet, kind, righteous children. This parable alone should refute such an idea as that. The fact is that it is human nature, fallen corrupt human nature, but human nature as we know it, is essentially ungrateful, it is capable of returning hatred for kindness, it is so dominated by sin that it can spit in the face of love. One of the incredible things about the atoning death of Jesus is that as He gave his life for undeserving sinners he died with the spittle of men running down his face. Still, our Savior loved a world of prodigals. Still the father of our story loved his son.

So, we have looked together at the longings of the prodigal and the goodness of the Father. Now we want to take a look at what life was like in the far country. **13-16** *And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.* <sup>14</sup> *Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished.* <sup>15</sup> *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.* <sup>16</sup> *And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.* The young man apparently liquidated all his assets and took off with his wallet loaded for what he thought would be the time of his life. And, for a while, he did have some fun. There was the thrill of new pleasures, the indulgence of his appetites for food and sex and the intoxication of wine. He wanted excitement and he found it for a while. For a while. He would occasionally think of the folks back home but whenever he did he felt guilty so he would do his best to forget. When you are soaking in the pleasures of the world, you can forget about God, you can forget about responsibility. I remember the testimony of Luther Hansley, a friend of mine who became a missionary to Haiti. His story paralleled that of the prodigal as well as any I've heard. He was the son of a pastor who was a godly man but Luther rebelled and began blowing his mind on drugs and loud music. He was a classic hippy who left home to roam about the country from one pot festival to the next and he described it as one long attempt to forget about his home and his God. And, if you have enough money or you have enough drugs, you can do that, and even enjoy it for a while. But it does not last long. The failure of sin to give satisfaction is due to many things. For one thing, the ability it has to interest us quickly runs out. As you have heard so many times about drugs, you soon get used to one drug and need something more, something stronger to get the same kick. You can get bored with drugs or food or sex. The drive for pleasure pushes you deeper and deeper into the sin but at some point the exhilaration is gone and all you are left with is one big price tag. And it is a big price tag. R.G. Lee was a great Baptist preacher of a generation ago and this man preached one

sermon 3000 times or so I am told. The sermon was called Payday Someday. He said there is for every man or woman a payday someday. At one point in this sermon he went from one story to the next repeating the same refrain that said, "Oh what a price I pay just for one riotous day, years of regret and grief." This young man was eventually forgiven and received back into the home but he never would get over what he had done. His pleasure was for a moment but his regret would be for a lifetime. The passage says he wasted his estate or his wealth with riotous living. "Wasted" is a horrible word. I don't know about you but I hate to waste money. I also hate to waste time and this young man wasted both. He lost his possessions, he lost the days of his youth, he lost his purity and his reputation. He went out and got wasted and did waste.

I bet it didn't take him long to become disenchanted with his new life. Sin looks so much better than it is. The first tastes are always the sweetest and, from there, it gets worse. But so many who are committed to finding their happiness in debauchery can really persevere. The world makes you miserable and then tells you that you are experiencing the good life. I remember my former pastor talking about how, when he was young, he and his buddies would get drunk together, go home at three in the morning to throw up, and go to bed feeling miserable. They would wake up with a headache, mope around all day and then gather again at night to talk about what a great time they had the day before. It absolutely astounds me about us but does it seem that we prefer learning life's lessons the hard way, if we learn them at all?

One of the factors that makes his situation so much worse is that he was, no doubt, warned against the things he did time and time again. So have you. One of the messages the Bible screams out to us time and time again is that sin leads to misery. The wages of sin is death. The Proverbs promise over and over again that loose living leads to poverty and sorrow. The commandments of Exodus and Deuteronomy tell of the price you pay for disobedience. Some of you are like this boy who grew up knowing God's word, being taught what is right, being shown the way of peace and yet you too turned your back on the truth and walked right into the trap against which you were warned. Yes, dear people there are restraints in the father's house, you can't do whatever you please as a Christian but those restraints are there for your good, for your good! We have been brainwashed by the devil and by the world that leaving home for the thrills of the far country is where it's at. Mike Warnke used to be a Christian comedian who traveled about sharing his story. Warnke was led to Christ after a life of incredible sin. He was into devil worship and the worst kind of drug abuse. He tells stories of how he was several times strung out and left for dead. Warnke makes a point to warn kids not to get into that kind of thing. He urges them to follow Christ from the days of youth and maintain their purity. But he says that invariably after he gets

done speaking to a group of kids someone will come up to him and say, "Its easy for you to tell us to go straight you've already had your fun." Warnke looks at these kids and says, "Fun, fun did you listen to what I said? My sin made me miserable. I didn't know what real joy was until I met Jesus." Pete Maravich, the basketball superstar, was the first athlete ever to sign a contract for over a million dollars per year. He said, "I never knew real joy until I met Jesus." When will we learn that joy is found in the bosom of the Father! We keep going after this, that or the other thinking it will satisfy. This ball game, this meal, that dress, that toy, that vacation, that relationship. We could save ourselves a lot of grief if we would believe God's word and find life and joy in relationship with the Father.

The prodigal decided to look elsewhere. One of the places he looked was to other people. No doubt when he had lots of money and times were good he was very popular with the party crowd. He had his friends who loved to share a keg with him, but when times got tough where were his buddies? It so happened that prodigal Pete's cash ran out right when the far country was hit with a severe depression. Some of us who are so concerned about the financial disaster that is awaiting us as a nation ought remember that God regularly uses material deprivation to remind us where spiritual treasure can be found. Bread lines in the US of A may be the best thing for us. 14 *Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. And his friends were nowhere to be found. So, 15-16 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.* He was looking to people to meet his need but to no avail. No one was giving him anything. Instead the prodigal became their slave. This young man was in bondage. He went to that land in order to gain what he regarded as freedom and wound up a slave. Independence huh? Think again. Jesus said that we are either slaves of God or slaves of the devil. In Romans chapter 6 Paul writes that you are slaves of the one you obey either a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. The point is you will be somebody's servant, God's or Satan's. Whose slave will you be? The prodigal went from being under the authority of one who loved him as a son to one who cared not a thing about him. Eventually our friend in the story saw the light and decided that serving his father even with the restrictions of morality that came with it was far better than what he discovered in the land of sin.

In verse 16 we find the prodigal at the lowest point imaginable. He was broke, starving and assigned the job of feeding pigs. There were a number of demeaning jobs that a Jewish boy could hold but this was the worst. As you know, under Old Testament legislation, hogs were considered unclean. It was defiling to eat a pig or touch a pig, and one of the rabbinic writings said, "Cursed

be the man who feeds swine." And here this boy, raised in a well-to-do pious Jewish home, was feeding the pigs; and more than that, he coveted their food. Remember that all this started with discontentment. It began with a sense of ingratitude for what his father had given him. I want you to look at Romans 1 yet again. In the parable we have read, we see in story form the beginnings of a life of sin and the final stages of a life of sin. In Romans one Paul gives us the cycle of sin in a straight descriptive form. **18** *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.* This is what the prodigal did in trying to forget his home and his God. **21-24** *even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* <sup>22</sup>*Professing to be wise, they became fools,* <sup>23</sup>*and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.* <sup>24</sup>*Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.* This is where it all leads. Sin leads to more sin which leads to more sin. But where did it all start? **21** *though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks.* Ingratitude, discontentment with the gifts of the Father. You start turning from God in that way and you wind up with the pigs. That is our look at life in the far country and it concludes our study of the rejection of the Father. But our story doesn't end there. As he was with the pigs and hungry and broke and friendless something happened. In the midst of his pain he remembered his father. **17** *But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!* His thoughts went back home. You see friend, it may not be God's wrath that is making you miserable in your sin. It may be His love. God's grace does not let us enjoy our sin. If you are God's child He will turn the pleasures of this world into dust in your mouth. He will lovingly send pain in your life to turn your heart toward home. C.S. Lewis said that "*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience but screams to us in our pain!*" Through his misery the prodigal heard the voice of his Daddy saying, "Son come home, come home." Listen to your pain and hear in it the voice of the Father. It is when the prodigal listens to his pain that our story begins to get really good and the prodigal finds the path of wisdom. We will follow him on that path when we continue next Sunday. when we will look at Act 2 of this great parable. Let's stand for prayer.