March 14, 2021
Cavern Baptist Adult Sunday School Lesson
based on Lifeway Explore the Bible, Luke 10-24, Spring 2021

**CELEBRATE?**
Presented by Terry Reed

Welcome to Sunday School for March 14, 2021. Today’s lesson is titled “CELEBRATE? Believers can celebrate God’s restoring forgiveness.” The focus today will be on Luke 15:20-32.

As we study the Gospel of Luke, don’t skip over the portions that are not specifically discussed in our Sunday School lessons. If you haven’t already, set up a Bible reading plan to ensure that you are exposed to the entire Word of God.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son starts at 15:11. Jesus tells the story of a father who had two sons. The younger son asked for his inheritance so he could leave home and go do his own thing. This seems a rather presumptuous request considering the father was still living. Surprisingly, the father agrees.

The younger son takes the loot and journeys to a far country where he squanders everything he has. On top of that, a severe famine impacts the region where he is living. Poor and desperate, he ends up taking a job feeding pigs. He’s was so hungry he would have gladly eaten the feed (probably Carob pods) that he was giving to the swine. In the Jewish culture, this job would be considered utterly demeaning since pigs were considered unclean.

This ends up being a wake-up call for the young man. He realizes that even his own father’s servants are better off than he is. So picks himself up and he decides to go home and beg for his father’s mercy. He regrets his foolish behavior and admits to himself that he is no longer worthy to be treated like a son. He merely hopes to be hired by his father as a servant.

FORGIVENESS GRANTED. 15:20-24. We get the sense from this passage that the father was regularly on the lookout for his youngest son because he sees the young man while he was still a long way off.

The father does not say to himself, “oh no, here come’s trouble.” His first thoughts are not filled with anger, resentment, or disappointment. We don’t see a man preparing the “I told you so” speech. Instead, he is immediately filled with compassion. He runs to his son, embraces him, and kisses him. The father is extremely happy to be reunited with his son.

The son starts to confess his unworthiness to be called a son. But the father ignores this. He has servants bring the best robe, rings, and sandals for his son. This are symbols of status and being an honored and accepted part of the family.

The father also calls for the fattened calf to be prepared for a very special feast to celebrate this homecoming.

Here’s another way to look at this story: A sinner finds himself lured away by the temptations of the world. At first, it seems like a dream come true. But then reality sinks in, and he realizes the wretched condition he is in. He comes home to the Heavenly Father whom he had rejected. He sorrowfully asks God for mercy, grace, and forgiveness. He knows he deserves punishment. But instead, he finds himself being welcomed home with love and compassion as if he’d never left home in the first place. God helps the sinner clean up his life. God wants everyone to come home. God Himself made the ultimate sacrifice to make the homecoming possible. But He’s not going to force us. Each one of us has a choice the make.

The lesson also tells us: “Christianity isn’t ‘Clean yourself up and run to God’ Rather, it’s ‘Run to God, and He will make you clean.”

RESENTMENT EXPRESSED. 15:25-30. Sometimes, when thinking about this parable, people forget about the older son. This is the son that stayed faithfully by his father’s side. As he comes back to the house from working in the field, he learns that his father has ordered a huge celebration in honor of his brother’s return “safe and sound.”

The older brother becomes angry and refuses to participate. He explains to his father that he has worked hard and never been disobedient, yet there had never been a celebration for him in all these years (not even a goat let alone the fattened calf). He can’t understand why his foolish and rebellious younger brother is worthy of such an extravagant party – or why he is being welcomed back at all.

The lesson tells us the elder brother represents the Pharisees and others who resented Jesus’ attention to sinners. They had a self-righteous attitude and thought they had a special relationship with God because of their works. They were quick to label others sinners, look down on them, and show no compassion or love for them. They did not celebrate when a sinner found faith.

REALITY DEFINED. 15:31-32. In this passage, the father explains that the elder has forgotten that he has had the benefit of sharing in everything the father has for all these years. He shared in his father’s life. He always had a home and a family. He never experienced loss.

But, the younger son was dead and is alive again. If you are a Christ follower, you were once dead in your sins, but now are alive in Christ. Clearly, that is a reason for celebrating. We should all celebrate the salvation of others.

If you are a Christ follower, you were once a lost sheep who came home. In Luke 15:6-7, Jesus says, “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

Extra Credit: Many Bibles refer to today’s story as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But where does the word “prodigal” come from? The dictionary tells us it means “characterized by profuse or wasteful spending” or “recklessness.” But I like what the Holman Bible Dictionary say about this. They point out that the story does not focus on the “reckless-then-repentant” younger son but on the waiting father who rushes to welcome his child home and calls ALL, elder brother included, to share the joy of homecoming.”

Join us today at Cavern Baptist. Our Sunday School classes meet at 9:45 am. Worship and preaching start at 11 am. We will Livestream on the Cavern Baptist FB page as usual. Masks and social distancing are appreciated.