

Parables of Jesus
The Prodigal God
Luke 15:11-32

9.18.2016
BIG Idea:

INTRODUCTION

- Welcome! I'm excited to be starting our series on the parables of Jesus today. Between now and Thanksgiving we are going to focus on the most famous stories Jesus told. Now, when we hear the word "stories" lots of different ideas come to mind.
 - ILL – I had a problem staying in bed as a little kid. I was a night owl and wanted to stay up but my parents kept insisting that I get a good night sleep. Because of their insistence I had to come up with creative ways to stay up. I would start with needing a glass of water but that only worked once a night at best. After all, who needs more than one glass of water in a 10minute period of time. So I began to say stuff like I was scared of the dark or I think I heard a monster in my closet. I wore my parents out with this so they told me the story of the boy who cried wolf...
 - Is that what Jesus is doing? Telling us a story with a nice moral to take with us? Tempted to see this when we hear Jesus but his parables are different than simple stories that tell us a lesson about life. These stories tell us more about REALITY.
 - Definition of a parable –sometimes referred to as an **"earthly story with a heavenly meaning."** Klyne Snodgrass in his significant book on parables says, generally, **"a parable is an expanded analogy used to convince and persuade."** –Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*
 - The immediate aim of a parable is to be compellingly interesting, and in being interesting it diverts attention and disarms. A parable's ultimate aim is to awaken insight, stimulate the conscience, and move to action.* –Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*
 - As we dive in, the parables are meant to bring us into the story and not simply cause us to reflect on it but to identify with characters and aspects of the story. So in these analogies Jesus uses contrasting ideas or individuals to reveal truth to us.
 - Today's parable is commonly called the Story of the Prodigal Son but it could be more accurately called "A Tale of Two Sons" or "The Tale of Scandalous Grace"
 - A key to understanding the parable: Shame/honor culture – where you avoided shaming others and especially those who should be honored the most among you. Many other cultures understand this. In Asian cultures it is shameful for a younger person to disrespect an older person and especially a father.
 - The main idea in the whole story is that **the Grace of God is scandalous.** MOVEMENTS IN THE STORY – all relate to the Father and his incomprehensible grace. The first half is the rebellious son and how he the Father relates to him and the last part is the religious son and how the Father relates to him. The Father is God and the rebellious son represents those that seem far from God and the religious son represents those who seem close to God but the truth is they both need the scandalous grace of God.
- 1. Rejecting the Father (vv.11-14)**
- The introduction of this story alone would have caused the religious leaders, called the Pharisees, to gasp in horror. The request of the son to receive what is his would have been utterly shameful and would have demonstrated no honor and respect for his father, and would have been considered a hateful thing to request. In this culture, you would not ask for such a thing

because it was essentially a request for the father to be dead, or at least dead in the son's heart.

- He wants to be done with this family and to live his own life. "*Give me the share of the property that is coming to me...*" This younger son wanted his father's goods, but not his father. In that culture, if this situation happened, the father would have been responsible for shaming his son. Beating him, casting him out publicly and then holding a mock funeral as if the son had died. This would have been the only way for the Father to maintain his honor and integrity.
- Instead of reacting by shaming his son, he takes the shame upon himself and gives the son what he asks. He would have had to liquidate his assets to give his son what he requested. No son would have received this kind of request in that culture. No self-respecting father would have allowed him to get away with such a dishonorable action. It didn't simply reflect on the son shamefully but on the father to not respond appropriately.
- What we see is this son's desire for sin was more than desire for his father. He WANTED sin. Our culture says be true to yourself and that is exactly what this son was doing. He didn't WANT the father. He just wanted his father's wealth. Sin can be defined as wrong desires. It is wanting God's blessings without wanting God. It is desiring to rule our own lives and use everything God has given us – life, health, talents, resources, and opportunity BUT we don't want the God who gave those things.
- And just like this parable reveals, sin is a relational issue. And it grieves the heart of the Father when we want his stuff but not want him. When we want away from him so we can do what we want. When we choose bondage to sin over freedom with the Father.
- The father gave his son his portion of the estate. The son sold what he was given so he could get some cash for travel. Meaning, his father's land was liquidated right in front of him so his son could leave home and the family behind.
- Then he travels to a far country where people don't worship God. A Jew would not have gone there unless absolutely necessary, but in this case, this son actually wanted to go there. Everything there was contrary to where he came from, but that is what he wanted – he wanted to do what he wanted to do. In this case, to drink, party, and have a lot of sex.
- Ironically, what felt like freedom, ended up enslaving him. In the moment when he left he felt in control, when he went to his first big party he was getting what he wanted, when he hooked up with his first woman he was finally doing what he wanted to do. It all FELT so free but he was in bondage and he was out of control. He SPENT IT ALL!
- v.14 He controlled his leaving and he controlled the way he spent the money but he COULDN'T control the famine that came. This is when things shifted for him and begins a new chapter, one that would find him negotiating with his father to let him come home.

2. Negotiating with the Father (vv.15-20a)

- V.15 – He hired himself out to a Gentile citizen of the country. Some rich guy who owned property used this man's hopelessness as a way of making him his slave. He no longer had any control, certainly not the control over his life he was seeking when he left. He had become a slave to sin both spiritually and now physically. **A picture of how sin enslaves us holistically.**
- He was forced to "feed the pigs," perhaps one of the worst jobs for anyone at this time. It would have been on fields that could not grow crops or vegetation because the pigs would destroy it. They would be kept in a field that was rocky and the pigs would have been fed "pods" which had barely any nutrition. For a Jewish man, this would have been the worst possible scenario. Pigs were considered an "unclean" animal and would have further shamed himself, his father, and the Jewish people which he represented.

- No Jewish boy would have ever stooped so low. This is so outrageous, so vile and disgusting, and so off the charts, that it would have been considered the worst possible picture of a Jewish son. It is as bad as it could get. This young man is **left homeless, helpless, and hopeless**. V.16 *And he was **longing** to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*
- "Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you are willing to pay." Sin leaves us homeless, helpless, and hopeless. Sin enslaves and is progressive. It will lead you to a place you CAN'T imagine when you start down the road. No one sets out to get addicted to porn or become an alcoholic. No one starts down the road of greed thinking, "I want to be the greediest person ever." BUT sin is progressive and enslaves us. We find ourselves in a place we never could imagine when we take that first step of doing what WE WANT or seeking to fulfill OUR desires.
- vv.17-18 *"But when he **came to himself**, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.""*
- The first step of repentance is "COMING TO OURSELVES" – seeing our sin and our situation. Then the son began to think of his father. Notice -- the son came back because he knew what kind of man his father was – kind, gracious, compassionate. BUT, he didn't know how kind, gracious and compassionate he was!
- v.19 –SUBTLE While this is bad theology and if you don't get past this you stay in sin, this is a point that everyone must come to – I owe God for my sin. A price must be paid for my sin. It can't be swept under the rug – its too great!
- The son was thinking, "I'll go and be a slave to my dad. The reference in the Greek is not to some random slave, but to becoming a skilled craftsman. "Maybe, just maybe after I've learned a skill and worked hard for some years I can pay my father back what I owe him."
- All sin creates a debt and that debt has to be paid. This is why Jesus is front and center to everything we are and do. Without him we are just a bunch of people aware of sin and with good intentions to do better BUT the debt hasn't been paid! Jesus stepped in and paid the debt we owed to restore us to the Father!
- This brings us to the third movement. The youngest son...

3. Receiving the Father's grace (vv.20b-24)

- The father didn't want his son's work, he wanted his son back. The Grace of the Father is Free, passionate, and complete; total forgiveness and restoration. v.20 - *And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*
- The saw the son while he was a long way off. He was LOOKING. And when he saw him he had COMPASSION. The father's heart was moved with love for his son.
- Then he did the unthinkable... he RAN to his son. Men in that culture didn't run. It was considered undignified, like men wearing capris pants. Seriously, older men didn't run. Yet, the father ran to his rebellious son and he embraced him and kissed him!
- This is the picture of God when we cry out to him in our sin. When we come to ourselves like the rebellious son, the Father has compassion and runs to meet us and embrace us!
- ILL – I was the younger son in college. I had taken everything God had given me and I had squandered it. I wanted what I WANTED and I didn't care about knowing my heavenly Father or experiencing his love toward me. I rejected God. BUT when I was a freshman in college I experienced the Father's scandalous grace toward me. I was embraced by my compassionate heavenly Father and all of my guilt and shame were taken away because of Jesus.
- If you are far from God today and feeling guilt and shame, know that the Father is looking for you.

He is looking for you to turn away from your sin and toward him. He loves you and wants to embrace you.

- v.21 – the son starts into his spiel – “Dad, I’m not worthy to be called your son, I want to pay you back.” V.22 “*But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate.*”
- Keller – “You are more sinful than you could ever dare imagine and you are more loved and accepted than you could ever dare hope-at the same time.”
- As we see the Father’s scandalous grace for his rebellious son there is a message for us as Christians. God’s grace can reach the people around us. God loves the rebellious son. He loves that woman at your work who is in a broken marriage. He loves your roommate who goes out to get drunk every night. He loves your friend who hooks up with a different person every weekend.
- Will you be a part of helping them to know about the Father’s scandalous love for them? The upcoming Alpha course, starting a week from tomorrow is an incredible opportunity. Maybe you are here and feeling disconnected from God. You know you have wandered far and wonder, “Can I really come home to the Father?” Yes! A first step may be marking your connection card today that you want to talk to someone. It may mean signing up for Alpha. If you feel like you are seeing things clearly for the first time, take that step toward the Father. You will find him ready to embrace you.
- If the parable stopped at this point it would have been great but Jesus shifts gears and mentions the older son and his response. We see the older son in the next movement...

4. Resenting the Father’s grace (vv.25-30)

- Interestingly almost the same amount of text is given to the older son’s self-righteousness as is given to the younger son’s rebellion.
- Why did the older son resent the Father’s grace toward his younger brother? There is more going on here than meets the eye so we need to understand the older son first before you understand his response.
- The older son felt like he was doing his family duty and had EARNED his father’s approval.
- V.28-29 “served you and never disobeyed your command. . . you never gave me a goat.” He thought he had EARNED all the Father’s blessings. The older son based the relationship with his father completely on obedience and disobedience. In his eyes he had done all of the good works to keep up his side of the deal, now the Father needed to do his part.
- For those of us who are the religious brothers – God owes us because we are good. Earning God’s favor by our religious performance. The root of this is PRIDE – Augustine said, “Pride is the mother pregnant with all sin.” The danger of pride is that we can see rebellion OUT THERE but pride can subtly hide in our own hearts. It is much harder for the religious brother to recognize his own prideful self-righteousness than it is for him to see his brother’s rebellion.
- So the religious son thought he had EARNED the father’s blessing. He had a strong sense of self-righteous privilege so when he saw his rebellious brother receiving grace, he resented it. He was like, “WHAT??? I have done all the right things and he gets a party???”
- But it wasn’t just that the father had scandalous grace for his brother. You have to understand that for the younger brother to be given a ring, a robe, shoes and a party – someone had to pay for them. Who? Who’s wealth was being used for this rebellious kid? The older brother’s portion of the inheritance!!! He was bitter because his rebellious brother was enjoying the

kindness of the father at his expense!!! V.30 "YOUR SON" not "my brother"

- Religious people get very self-righteous about their goodness. You feel good that you are at church more than other people. You feel good that you read your bible and follow the rules more than other people. Religious people are those who are quick to judge.
- If you are relating to God on terms of your obedience then you will always be judgmental of those who don't measure up to your standard. Always wanting to point to other people's sin but not able to see that they were alienated from God themselves because of their self-righteousness!
- While I was the younger son earlier in life, I find in myself the religious son's attitude at times. I find myself at times quick to judge people who struggle with sins that I don't. It is SO SUBTLE. 21 Years ago yesterday I was ordained as a pastor. It is so easy to believe that I deserve more favor from God because of being a pastor, or the "achievements" I have but that is sin in me. The truth is, the older brother NEEDED grace just as much as the younger brother, he just didn't see it.
- In the case of this older son, repentance would NOT have been remorse for his bad deeds but sorrow over his self-righteous pride! It's the same for us. We need to repent of our pride. Our looking down on people. Our judgment of others and our sense of self-justification.
- The message of this parable is not simply how amazing God's grace is for those who have wandered far, but also a warning to those who think they are near because of their religious duty.
- Who was in greater danger in this parable – the younger or older brother? The older! The younger knew he had wandered far from the Father and had sinned against heaven and the father, yet the older brother didn't realize that even though he was in the home with his father, he was just as alienated, just as distant from God.
- The fourth movement reveals the older son resenting the grace of the Father. Finally, in the last movement, we see the older son...

5. Encountering the Father's grace (vv.31-32)

- Now, you have to understand the shameful actions of the older brother. The Father was throwing the party of the year and his oldest son was NOT at the table, sitting at his right hand like he should have been. His father threw this party and yet he chose to dishonor his father. This would have been very embarrassing for the father. The natural reaction would be to go outside and yell, "Get your rear end in there. You are embarrassing me!"
- How the father responded to the oldest son – v.31-32 *And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'*
- The Grace of the Father is revealed here as he lovingly pleads for his son's repentance. The father offers forgiveness and restoration.
- The parable ends without telling us if the older son repented and was restored. I think Jesus did that on purpose but it remained to be seen how the self-righteous people of his time would respond to him.

CONCLUSION

- Jesus tells another parable in this chapter of Luke: About a shepherd who loses a sheep and goes and finds it. Then he says this: *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.*

PEOPLE IN BACK TO PRAY WITH YOU

COMMUNION – The Father has absorbed the cost of your return home...

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