

May 22, 2016 Neighborhood Church - The Parable of the Lost Son - Luke 15:11-32

My daughter, Misha, asked me a question last week about an assignment she was presenting to her 8th graders. The assignment was going to be a group project and she was asking me if I had any advice that she could convey to her students about how to successfully complete a group project.

Who here has been involved in a group project(high school, college, work)?

Do you remember the grade you received? Did everyone get the same grade?

Did everyone give the same amount of effort?

Were any of you resentful of the person who got the same grade but contributed less? (There's a socialism lesson in there but that's not my point)

Why were you resentful?

So my tongue in cheek answer to Misha was to make sure that they had one highly motivated person in their group and ride on their coattails. She said didn't think she could offer that as a viable strategy...

Anyway, we'll find out later if that has anything to do with the message today.

We are continuing on in our series on the parables and since Kyle stole my first choice, the parable of the talents, my second choice was the Parable of the Lost Son.

Originally when I chose this particular parable I had a very different idea of how I was going to present it, but as I studied, God started to nudge me in a different direction.

Also, I had a friend, during an unrelated discussion, brought up this parable and helped me see things from a different perspective. So we'll explore all of that.

First, let me Pray and we'll get into the text.

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to ^[b] one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "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! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" 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. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'^[c] ²² But the father said to his servants, ^[d] 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ 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.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Most churchgoers know this story well and have been hearing lessons and sermons about it since Sunday school. And with good reason, it is a wonderful story of repentance and the grace of God. It is also rich with topics and I could probably preach on this for four weeks.

Since I only have my time this morning, I want to make a couple of points and then just focus on one character in particular.

I. Let's start with a few pertinent details:

A. This the third parable in chapter 15 that takes place at a dinner where the Pharisees are judging Jesus for associating with sinners and taxpayers

B. This story is only found in the Gospel of Luke, possibly as a result of Luke's attention to detail and desire to provide an "orderly" account

C. Unlike the two previous parables, the "lost" item here does not wait to be found, but seeks out the father upon realizing that he is lost. ("He came to himself" is the phrase that Jesus uses.)

D. Jesus presents 3 characters as the principals in the story

1. The young son
2. The Father
3. The older brother

Each of these characters represents somebody at the time Jesus was telling the story. The young son represented the taxpayers and sinners that Jesus was "associating" with, the Father represented God and the older brother was the Nation of Israel, generally and the Pharisees more specifically.

In my experience and in my study, I have found that most of the teaching are focused on the repentant nature of the son or the incredible grace of the father, and why not? As is said earlier it is a great story of redemption and grace. But with my remaining time, I would like to take a look at the older son and what lesson might be there for us today.

Let's look at what we know about the older son:

By the way, who here is a firstborn?

The Good -

- He was hard working

it says he was in the fields when his brother came home

- He was obedient

"I have never disobeyed you..."

- He was loyal

"these many years I have served you"

Any of you firstborns relate to these traits?

The Bad -

- He was angry (v. 28)

- He was stubborn (v. 28)

- He was resentful (v. 29 & 30)

When I decided on this parable, it was because I identified with the younger son, I am the youngest in my family after all. I was the sinner that was seeking and craved the grace of the Father. I think all of us, that have given out lives to Jesus, regardless of birth order, can relate to where the younger son was at in his desperation and degradation. I came to Jesus when I was 30, so I feel like I literally was the "prodigal."

But like I said, God had a different message to convey through me and it started with that conversation with a friend I mentioned at the beginning.

We were discussing some things about our jobs and she was feeling underappreciated and that others were benefitting as a result of their circumstances and people like her, who had been hard working and loyal in their circumstance were getting overlooked. That's when she said to me that she felt like the older brother in this parable. When I asked her about it she said to me that "he was so loyal and faithful and he got nothing..."

At first, I thought, Yeah, he did get a raw deal but it became clear as I studied that that wasn't really the case. In fact, because of the way inheritance was split in that culture he was still in line for 2/3 of the estate. Which was everything because the younger son had already received his share which was 1/3. A point his father makes clear when he says that everything I have is yours (v. 31). That includes anything that is added to the estate up to the father's death.

I don't know why the older son is so bitter and resentful, I'm sure that if he had asked his father for a goat to roast with his friends, it would have been given to him. I think he thought his younger irresponsible brother should continue to pay for his indiscretions for the rest of his life.

But that's not how our God works! Praise the Lord!

The older brother should not receive our pity because he didn't get a big reunion party or because he did not receive his inheritance, he did. He should be pitied because he was unable to comprehend the joy of his "dead" brother returning or understand why his father was so overjoyed. So if we are bitter and resentful and identifying with the older brother we need to examine ourselves and revisit the blessings we have already received as well as the blessings that are to come.

My ask of you, Church, is to try and identify a brother or sister that you feel resentment towards. Maybe you know somebody that is always getting away with stuff or somebody you feel frequently gets what they don't deserve or haven't worked for. Maybe it's somebody that has a list of sins that is so extensive that you have doubts about their salvation. Somebody who you feel squandered their inheritance. And I want you to ask Jesus to take the bitterness and resentment and replace it with the joy He feels when another lost soul joins the kingdom and remind you of your inheritance as an heir of the King.

Closing -

We never find out what the older brother ends up doing. Did he go to the party or did he stay outside and sulk. Did he reconcile with his younger brother, or even his father, for that matter? I have two theories; the first is that for the purpose of that evening and the circumstances that Jesus was telling the story, what

happened to the older son was not relevant. But secondly, and more importantly, I think it was left up to us to complete his story. We are the older brother in many cases and we have the opportunity to write the ending. It is up to us to choose if we want to continue to live with resentment and bitterness or choose to recognize how blessed we are with the things that we already have and share in the joy of those that receive the same blessings we already have.

Lets pray!