

PARABLE OF THE WONDERFUL FATHER

by

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Theme: The Heavenly Father looks every day "up the road," ready to welcome home prodigals.

Theme Text: Luke 15:11-24

In the previous parables of lostness, Jesus has told of a lost sheep that was lost unintentionally and a coin lost through carelessness. This parable of the lost son is, by contrast, a wilful lostness, a lostness by intentional choice. The son willfully breaks from the restraints of home. He is old enough to be responsible for his own choices and conduct. He exercises his own free will, a citadel that God Himself never violates. He chooses to leave home, and he alone can choose to come home. Only when he sees his son in the distance does the Father go out to meet him.

The Son's Choice

He has reached the age where he thinks he knows more than his father does. He is tired of the restraints of home. He is weary of his father's watchfulness. He wants freedom. He wants fun. He has heard about the pleasures of the far country. Self-will grows stronger in his heart. He will do as he pleases. He will have his own way. He demands a division of the property. (Jewish law afforded the elder son two-thirds of the family inheritance. He has a right to his share, but not as long as his father lives.) His heart is already in the far country. His feet were sure to follow.

On Becoming a Prodigal

A person becomes a prodigal in gradual stages. The transition is made in degrees. A person is first a prodigal in the heart, then in fact. The transition may not always be immediately visible, but inevitably—though perhaps imperceptibly—the cracks begin to show and the condition of the heart is evidenced in attitude and behavior.

Hard Consequences

In the far country he "wastes his substance with riotous living." He has the best chariot and the fastest horses in town. He lives in style, spends freely. He revels in his freedom. No hampering restraints, no guilt-producing influences, no disquieting cautions. Too many "friends" to count. He lives hard and fast and with abandon, fleetingly feeling sorry for his poor brother still at home. As often happens when we follow the Devil's enticing lures, just at the moment we think we have it all, a twist of fate reveals our true condition (cf. Rev. 3:17). Famine strikes. The prodigal finds himself

penniless on the streets. His "friends" leave him in the dust. His last remaining hold on life is the pittance he is able to earn feeding a man's pigs.

A Long Look in the Mirror

At this point in the story, the prodigal does an about-face from "give me" to "make me." "Give me" represented the epitome of self-will. "Make me," represents a surrender of his will. The Scripture says the prodigal "came to himself." Perhaps he caught a long look at himself in the mirror. His clothes are in rags. His eyes are sunken, his cheeks hollow, his stomach shrunken. Perhaps he had a flash of insight into his true condition, really understood his lostness, his helplessness, the hopelessness of his condition, how far away from home he really was (cf. Eph. 2:1-3, 12-13; Rom. 5:6-10). His thoughts turn toward home. His senses come alive as he smells the aromas from the kitchen, lingers on his vision of each face, abandons himself to the memories of the good times. Even the servants live in luxury compared to this. He will go to his father. He knows he deserves nothing. He has squandered his inheritance; he has not more rights in his father's house. But perhaps he will take him in as a hired hand. There's nothing to lose.

The Wonderful Father

In one of Scripture's most glorious metaphors for our Heavenly Father, the boy's father appears on the scene, looking longingly down the road for the returning prodigal. And when he sees him a long way off, his heart leaps and his legs run. He throws his arms about him, lifts him off his feet and twirls him around. He sets him back down, holds him at arms length, looks long into his face, then draws him to himself again in another long embrace. The boy is babbling something about becoming one of the hired men, but the father will hear nothing of it. What is he talking about!

This is his son he had given up for lost! The dead come back to life! He needs food. He needs clothes. He needs to tell his story, but that can wait. "Hurry," he calls out to the servant who has followed to see what all the commotion is about. "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"

So it is with us. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:1-9).

What a wonderful father! It's never too late for new beginnings! Let the celebration begin!