

## **The Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32**

### **Who is the prodigal son? (part 1)**

The one who is far from God could be the person who attends the church regularly. The appearance of holiness and closeness to God can be very deceptive. The reason is that these external demonstrations of spirituality dull the mind into thinking that since I go to church and I read the Bible and attend prayer meeting, I must be close to God and might even be a Christian! However, this parable of the prodigal son demolishes this false notion of self delusion. It is a very stark reminder that true Christianity is more than skin deep. Performing all the visible expressions of Christianity will not turn a sinner into a saint just like a dressing up one's pet dog in tuxedo coupled with manicure and pedicure will not turn him into a gentleman.

This parable of the prodigal son, as it is commonly called, reflects such a life. The lives of two sons are contrasted here for our consideration. We are either one or the other. We cannot be both! The scene was set in a typical but wealthy Jewish home.

**The Elements of the Parable** – A certain man refers to God the Father; the two sons refer to either a sinner saved by grace or a sinner working his way toward salvation; riotous living refers to the debauched life of every sinner. [NOTE--In the interpretation of all parables one must be reminded to separate the key elements from the embellishments found in the parables to complete the storyline of the parable.]

**The interpretation of the Parable** – From the parables of the lost sheep to the lost coin to the prodigal son, there is an increasing order of value in terms of percentage--from 1 out of 100 (Lost sheep) to 1 out of 10 (lost coin) to 1 out of 2!

The younger son was the first focus. He commanded his father to give ("give" is in the imperative) to him (emphasis) what belongs to him which in this case was his inheritance! A godly son would not even think of asking for his inheritance before his father dies. To do so was to say to the father "why are you not dead yet?" This premature demand of the younger son was highlighted by Christ here to show how evil and wicked his son was. He did not care for anything or anyone but himself. On the other hand, this father was kind beyond measure! He divided his wealth and gave his younger son his portion. The reaction of the elder son is not recorded here but later.

For the next few verses the profligate life of the younger son is described for our self examination because it is a description of our own life as a depraved sinner without Christ!

Few days later, this younger son who had gathered all his inheritance together and left home. He went into a far country to get away from his father and his influence so that he could literally do whatever he wanted without any accountability or restraint. He wasted all his inheritance on riotous living. When he had spent it all, a famine arose in that land. He

began to be in great lack. Without food, and lodging, he had no choice but to join himself (to glue himself together) with a citizen of the country. He worked for him in the fields, feeding swine. For a Jew to come new pigs was bad enough but to work in the fields under the hot sun feeding them was taboo! However, he was very desperate. How desperate was he? The situation became so unbearable that he wanted from the bottom of his heart to eat the food offered to the swine (15:16). In other words, he was extremely low in his estimation of himself that he equalled himself with the pigs. But no one gave that to him! The people around him felt that he was lower than pigs!

When he was reduced to this state of abject total humiliation, he came to his senses. He thought of his home and how rich his father was. He would humble himself and literally crawl back to his father and begged him to take him back but not as a son anymore but as one of his hire servants. He said to himself, *"18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."* With this humility in his heart and this thought of servant-hood in his mind he trudged the long way back home!

The amazing thing in this story was that the father had been longing for his lost son to return home. While he was a great way off from home his father saw him. His father had compassion on him and ran to his lost son! He fell on his neck (cf. Genesis 45:14) i.e. to hug him and kissed him over and over again (the use of the compound verb *"kata-phi-le-o"*).

The son started to speak what was in his heart. He acknowledged he had sinned against heaven (which to the Jews would mean against God) in the sight of his father. This was a very grievous acknowledgement of his sin. He does not deserve to be called his son any longer. But before he could finish the rest of what was in his heart, the father interrupted him by turning to his servants (slaves) to *"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."* The father made him his son again. The giving of the best robe, putting a ring in his hand and shoes in his feet are all gestures of complete acceptance of sonship and not servanthood. What the repented son wanted was right in that he had already taken and wasted his inheritance, from the legal standpoint. What the father has given back to his son was grace. This was more than right for it was righteous! The father was not concerned with the material. He was concerned for the soul of his lost son! He was not thinking about how much of his son's inheritance, which really was the father's wealth that he had wasted. His son was like one who was dead, and but he is alive and now has returned home. The joy he felt was indescribable! The best way was to celebrate with a great feast as if a very important person has arrived. This was how the father and the servants felt. However, not everyone in the household was happy.

The reaction of the elder son was one of anger and jealousy. [to be continued]