

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Prodigal Son

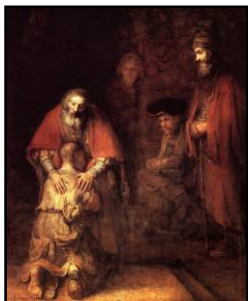
Part 15 – September 23, 2007

[VIDEO: DIGNAM FARM]

Animals need to be fenced in. If they're not, they'll wander away and get lost. They have no idea of the hazards and dangers that lie outside: freeways, poisons, coyotes, starvation. In their ignorance, they just see ... freedom.

We're not so different. When we wander away from God's boundaries and shelter, all we're really "escaping" is peace, purpose, and protection. In the parable of The Prodigal Son, Jesus reveals a Father who wants us to leave the pig pen and come into His home.

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! 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 they began to celebrate." - *Luke 15:11-24 NIV*



This parable is easily the most memorable of all Jesus' stories. He told it in response to the Pharisees accusation: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." (*Luke 15:2*) It's known as: The Gospel *within* the Gospel. Do you know why it's called: The "prodigal" Son? Do you know what the word "prodigal" even means? It means "wasteful," it comes from verse 13:

... [He] squandered his wealth in wild living. - *Luke 15:13 NIV*

This is the parable of the inebriated, *wasteful* son. We still use the expression: "He got wasted"; this guy got "prodigaled!"

There are two big surprises in this story. The *second* one is the most obvious, and the most well known: It's when the father forgives and forgets! But, there's another really big shocker, that would've floored Jesus' listeners; *especially* the Pharisees in the crowd. It's when the father grants the request!

Under Jewish law the younger of two sons was entitled to 1/3 of his father's estate upon *death* (2/3 goes to the eldest son). It was harsh and insulting to ask for it while the dad is alive. It's like saying: "I know you're gonna drop dead some day ... but not soon enough for me; I want my share now!" The Pharisees would expect the father to respond with outrage and indignation ... not compliance with the defiant son's demands!

And then the father's humiliation goes public:

... the younger son got together all he had ... - *Luke 15:13 NIV*

This means he sold off his share of the estate so that he could have cold, hard cash. He goes as soon as possible, and as far away as possible.

[He] set off for a distant country ... - *Luke 15:13 NIV*

He wants what the world has to offer. He's bought into the deception that whatever happens in the distant country *stays* in the distant country! He wants to be out from under the influence of his father and his family. And he wants to escape all those who know him best. I've noticed that when believers begin living in unremorseful sin, the first thing they do is to stop attending church.



This father would've tried to talk his son out of going, but notice that he *does* let him go. God doesn't chase us, He releases us. He will not stop us if we're determined to go. He loves us too much to force us to stay in fellowship with Him. And His heart is only delighted when His will is done willingly.



This father gave his son what he *thought* he wanted, in the hope that the consequences would ultimately drive him to want something better. Some things we only learn through pain. Convictions come from experience ... but for now, it's party time!

[He] squandered his wealth in wild living. - *Luke 15:13 NIV*

He's cruisin' the Egyptian strip on his pimped out Camelac! Sin is fun ... for a season. Jesus doesn't say it isn't enjoyable, just shortsighted. It can be great fun, till the bill comes due!

There was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. -
Luke 15:14 NIV

Party's over! He's broke; alone; wallet's empty; life's empty. Nature has a way of disciplining children in ways their parents can't. So, be careful not to short-circuit natural consequences. But this kid was raised on a farm – he'll just get a job.

So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. - *Luke 15:15 NIV*

Turns out, the only work he can find is feeding pigs ... the lowest humiliation for a Jew. Pig farms are strictly off limits! And obviously they don't pay so well.

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. - *Luke 15:16 NIV*



The Pharisees would be enjoying the story at this point! Tending pigs was one thing, eating their food was utterly horrifying! A just end to this rebellious, irreligious, immoral, young man. Notice the word: "pods". These are carob pods; the same carob that's used to make the healthier chocolate alternative.

What he wanted was freedom; what he got was bondage; and therein lays the call and the consequence of sin.

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!" - *Luke 15:17 NIV*



The bad news is: You don't have to be in a distant country to be disconnected from God. The good news is: You don't have to be in a pigpen to come to your senses! God often waits at the bottom of the barrel. And now, the prodigal son swallows something more tasteless than carob pods: his pride.

I will set out and go back to my father and say ... - *Luke 15:18*

- A. He'll "set out" – make the decision to leave that pigpen.
- B. He'll "go back" – turn from sin and *return* to his father.
- C. He'll "say" – unconditionally confess his sinfulness.

And he decides to say three things:

1. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you" (*Luke 15b:18*)

When we sin against others, we sin against God.

2. "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 19a)

He takes full responsibility. He faces reality and admits his unworthiness. He doesn't blame. He doesn't make excuses.

3. "Make me like one of your hired men" (Luke 19b)

Wow. He's gone from "Give me my share" to "Make me your servant".

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him ... - Luke 15:20a NIV

Q: Why did his father see him when he was still: "a long way off"?

A: Because his father had worn a path to the highest hill, where he scanned the horizon every day; waiting; watching; wishing.



Jesus is emphasizing a startling truth: God eagerly anticipates each sinner's return! And this son has returned of his own free will! Just as the actions of the arrogant son offended the Pharisees sense of decency, so too the *compassion* of the father violated their perception of God's nature.

... he ran to his son ... - Luke 15:20b NIV

In Jesus' day, men wore long robes. In order to run you had to hike up your hem and bare your legs; it was highly undignified. But this dad don't care! He's not embarrassed.

... threw his arms around him and kissed him. - Luke 15:20c NIV

The Greek verb indicates that he kept on kissing him - *smothered* him in kisses! And he does this *before* the son confesses his sin.



There's not even a *hint* of: "I told you so!" Do you know this Father? Are *you* like this Father? The language of acceptance is physical. He runs, he hugs, and he kisses! Fathers, tell your kids you love them. Hug them. Kiss them. You weren't brought up that way? Then it's time to change ... *express* that love!

Now, watch how he cuts off his son's three-part, prepared speech:

The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick!" - Luke 15:21-22a NIV

He allows him to acknowledge his guilt ("I have sinned"), and his shame ("I am no longer worthy"), but he won't let him demote himself from a son to a servant.

He'll have none of this nonsense about *earning* his keep. He'll be restored by the same grace that allowed him to go.

Bring the best robe and put it on him. - *Luke 15:22b NIV*

Who owns the best robe? The father! He was willing to stain his finest, personal robe in order to cover the pig filth that clung to his son.

Don't make the mistake of trying to clean yourself up before coming back to God ... just come on home.

Put a ring on his finger ... - *Luke 15:22c NIV*

This son probably wore a family ring, until he pawned it. The new ring symbolizes his reinstatement into the family.

... and sandals on his feet. - *Luke 15:22d NIV*

Slaves didn't wear shoes - but sons did. The father is restoring everything this sinful son had "prodigaled".

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. - *Luke 15:23 NIV*

He's a *different* man. He's a new son.

He left rebellious and returned repentant. He's been reborn!

So they began to celebrate. - *Luke 15:24 NIV*

We serve a God who runs when we return, restores when we repent, and rejoices when we're reborn!

TRUE OR FALSE

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. The Lord runs to those who stop running away.
2. When it comes to sin, God likes to rub it in.
3. When it comes to sin, He likes to rub it out.
4. God will embrace you even when you smell like pig poop.