

AUTHENTIC FELLOWSHIP

Luke 15:11-32

INTRODUCTION:

For the previous three weeks, we've been taking a leisurely look at the parable in Luke 15:11-32. Most commonly, this is called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The Bible does not call it that. The word "prodigal" does not appear in the text of this parable. It is a title that people have put on the parable.

If you have been with us for the past few weeks, you probably know that I don't much care for the man-made title: Prodigal Son. First of all, the term prodigal does not appear anywhere in the Bible. Furthermore, in my opinion, the main character of this story is not the younger son but rather his older brother.

Over the last few weeks, we have established that the English word "prodigal" means extravagant and lavish to the point of being wasteful. And I would suggest to you that there are multiple prodigals in this parable.

- There was a younger son who was extravagant with his wealth.
- There was a father who was extravagant with his mercy.
- And there was an older son who was extravagant with his criticism.

The parable begins with the words, *"There was a man who had two sons."* And there was such a man in the parable that Jesus told. And he did have two sons, as Jesus told the story. But did you realize there are really three sons in this parable?

- There is the younger son who left home.
- There is the older son who stayed home.
- And there is the Son who told the story so we would know what home is like.

We do not know the name of the younger son. Jesus did not give him a name. And we do not know the name of the older son. Jesus did not give him a name, either. But we know the name of the Son who told the story...Jesus IS his name.

The Son who told the story about the sons, teaches us that his home (and ours) is a place of:

I. **Prodigal Patience**

As Jesus created the illustration, the younger of these two sons asked for his share of his father's inheritance, took the money, left home, went to a foreign country and there wasted all of his money in wild living. Eventually, a famine hit the land, there was not enough food to eat and the penniless young man was reduced to feeding pigs and wishing that he

could share their food. But he was not allowed and he thought he was going to starve to death.

Well, he was broke and then he was broken. Having come to his senses, he decided to return to his father and ask for the right to work for his father as a hired servant.

And you will recall that while he was still a long ways off, his father saw him, ran to him, embraced him and welcomed him home.

The younger son in this parable represents sinners. The older son, who appears later in the parable, represents religious people. And the father in the parable represents God.

One truth that Jesus illustrates through this story is that God is extravagantly patient with sinners.

The younger son had wasted his father's hard-earned wealth, broken his father's loving heart and damaged his father's good name. But for all of that, the dad in the story did not chase after the boy, hunt him down and drag him home. He waited patiently for the man to come to his senses so that he could come to his father.

That is such an accurate rendering of the picture of our heavenly Father. God is extravagantly patient with us. We disobey His will. We rebel against His way. We break His heart. We tarnish His name. But God does not jerk us back to Him like a master might with a dog on a leash. Our God, in His prodigal patience, waits for us to come to our senses so we will come back to Him.

God does not manipulate, contrive or coerce us into returning. He patiently waits. And, as a parent, I have learned that this can be one of the most difficult things a parent must ever do: to patiently wait on his child.

We patiently wait for them to learn to walk and to talk. We patiently wait for them to mature into responsible people who make wise choices. Before they are married, we patiently wait for them to come home from their first date. And after they are married, we patiently wait for them to come to our house at all!

It is especially difficult for a parent to patiently wait when we see our kids, those we love more than life itself, making unwise choices and dangerous decisions. But when they get to a certain age, about the best thing we can do is patiently wait.

I want you to know that your heavenly Father is patiently waiting for you to come home to Him. There is a song in our hymnal that says:

*The Savior is waiting to enter your heart –
Why don't you let Him come in?
There's nothing in this world to keep you apart –
What is your answer to Him?*

*Time after time He has waited before,
And now He is waiting again
To see if you're willing to open the door –
O how He wants to come in.*

The song is about Jesus and Jesus is the perfect reflection of God so it is fair to say that God is also patiently waiting for you. Won't you come to Him today?

II. **Prodigal Grace**

When Jesus told this story, he also wanted us to understand that our eternal home is a place of prodigal grace...lavish grace...extravagant, profuse and boundless grace.

Grace is defined as unmerited favor. That is, undeserved kindness.

In the parable, the younger son certainly did not deserve to be welcomed home. He certainly had not merited being reinstated as a son in his father's household. He had not earned a place in the home.

And we have not, either. None of us deserve to be forgiven of our sins, acquitted of our offenses and exonerated of our disobedience of God. None of us merit being reinstated into God's family as His children. And none of us have earned a place in God's eternal and heavenly home.

But don't you see? That's the whole point of God's prodigal grace: He lavishes kindness upon us that is in contrast to the callousness we have shown to Him.

And it is a good thing. If God treated us like we deserve, we would all be doomed. But He doesn't. He gives us what we need to receive instead of what we ought to receive.

G. W. Knight has said:

When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not

capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award--yet receives such a gift anyway--that is a good picture of God's unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.

Or, as Dotty Rambo put it, "He looked beyond my fault and saw my need."

Friend, your eternal home is a place of prodigal grace – grace sufficient for all your need.

III. Prodigal Joy

And your eternal home is a place of prodigal joy.

As Jesus told the tale, the returning son was welcomed, restored and reinstated. Then his father threw a party to celebrate his homecoming. It was a lavish party with lots of guests. The fattened calf was butchered so there would be plenty to eat. There was music. There was dancing. There was festivity and joy.

In that same chapter in Luke, Jesus said that there is great joy in heaven over one lost sinner who is found and who repents.

We live in a big world. The world's population is just over 6.675 billion people. About 2.1 billion identify themselves as Christian. If only one out of 1,598 of us were to lead a person to salvation every year, there would be a soul saved every minute of every hour of every day. Now if there is great joy in heaven when a lost soul comes home, doesn't it pretty much follow that the celebration will probably never end?

Jesus told us a trilogy of parables so that we would know that our heavenly home is a place of prodigal joy.

- A shepherd lost a sheep, searched until he found it and then, in his joy, threw a party.
- A woman lost a coin, searched until she found it and then, in her joy, hosted a celebration.
- A father lost a son. But he did not search until he found him. Rather, he waited until the boy found himself, found his way home, found his waiting father and found his place back in the family. And then, in his joy, the father gave a welcome home party for his son.

I know you've seen the common theme: our Father's house is a place of joy; great joy; plentiful joy, bountiful joy, prodigal joy. Wouldn't you like to be a part of a celebration like that? You can be. I'm here to deliver your invitation to the party.

CONCLUSION:

Years ago, there was a bag lady in New York City who attended a preaching service at a Manhattan Rescue Mission. Afterwards, in the line to receive soup, she mentioned to the preacher she was now ready to give her life to Jesus. She said, "I never knew until today that my name is in the Bible."

The preacher smiled and said, "What's your name?" She said, "Edith. My name is Edith. And my name is in the Bible."

The preacher said, "I'm sorry ma'am but you must be mistaken. The name Edith never appears in the Bible." She said, "Oh yes it does, you read it a few minutes ago!"

He opened his Bible and she pointed her dirty finger to Luke 15:2. The preacher had been using the King James Version, and it says, "*This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.*" She said, "There it is! Jesus receiveth sinners and Edith with them!"

And indeed, the good news is Jesus does receive sinners, and Edith with them; and Darrel with them; and Jane with them; and Mary with them; and John with them and anyone else who will come to Him!

I truly believe that the Son who told the story about the sons in the story, wanted us to know what his Father's home is really like. It is a home of abounding patience, lavish grace and abiding joy.

He also wanted us to know that those who will enjoy his Father's home are the ones who can rejoice when those who have strayed are brought home, when those who are lost are found and when those who are dead are made alive. Don't you know that when we all get to heaven, that is going to be a day of rejoicing? And don't you want to be a part of the party?

INVITATION: # 772 – "*When We All Get To Heaven*"