

Our text this morning is Luke 15:11-32.

It is a well known text. The difficulty with it being so familiar is that the context of the parable often becomes overlooked or forgotten and then the understanding of the parable becomes a simple cliché like the title it is frequently given, The Parable of the Prodigal Son.

It is not difficult to see why many would put the emphasis of the teaching of the parable on the “prodigal” son. It seems at first reading that this character is the character around which the entire parable is built and therefore he must represent the primary intent of the lesson that Jesus wants His hearers to know.

We must also say that the “prodigal son” is central to the story but he or something about him is not the main point. We must also say that without him being the central character there is no point of reference for a main point as the story is told. He is critical to the entire teaching that Jesus is giving. He is the focus from where the application will come but he is not the main teaching point of the parable.

So as has been our custom as we set the stage for the story let’s put the parable in the context in which it is to be understood and then we can discover what Jesus was teaching in this parable.

Our Scripture reading this morning was Luke 15:1-32.

This is the context for our parable. Our sermon text is set in the context of all 32 verses and there are two parables that precede this one. All three of them, like the kingdom parables, need to be taken as a whole. If we were going to do church like they do in some parts of Ukraine and other countries we would be here all day with a dinner and a supper break and I would preach at least three sermons and possibly 5 because there are easily three sermons in our text of vs. 11-32.

The first two parables I would probably preach as one message and then follow with this third as a separate one or more. Today it will be one.

So I will summarize the teaching of the first two parables in this group and we will establish the common thread between them and then focus on our text.

15:1* ¶ Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.2* Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them.

Once again, Jesus is confronted by religious hypocrites. Those men who were engaged in the theater of piety and who possessed a kind of righteousness that Jesus warned against. If one was going to be a disciple of Christ their righteousness had to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees and the scribes as we studied in the Sermon on the Mount.

These men who were so full of themselves and their piety in almost every encounter with Jesus not only showed their hypocrisy concerning the Scriptures but showed the hardness of their hearts towards sinners and they treated these people as sub-standard people, a class far removed from their hypocritical selves, excommunicated from the synagogues they were social outcasts, the worst of the worst.

The Pharisees and scribes were legalists of the highest order and proud of it. If they could have been given merit awards like Boy Scouts for their hypocrisy they would have a chest full of them always on display.

However, their attitude was sufficient to portray what kind of men they were.

Once again these men are attacking Jesus, verbally, because not only does He attract these sinners to His ministry but He associates with them. It is in this venom charged atmosphere that Jesus teaches these three parables. Each parable gives an answer as to why He associates with sinners and the third has even another point.

The first answer in verses 3-7 is that his receiving sinners is like a shepherd who finds a lost sheep and celebrates with all his friends.

The second answer in verses 8-10 is that his receiving sinners is like a woman who finds a lost coin and celebrates with all her friends.

And in both answers Jesus leaves no doubt about what he means, because in verses 7 and 10 he tells the Pharisees that the lost sheep and the lost coin represent lost sinners, and the being found represents repentance, and the celebration is what God and all the angels are doing in heaven.

Now in verses 11-24 Jesus gives a third answer to the Pharisees' accusation. When he receives sinners and eats with them, it is like a father who finds a lost son and celebrates with all of his house. All three parables have this in common: being lost and being found followed by great joy in heaven.

Verse 6: "Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost!"

Verse 9: "Rejoice with me for I have found the coin which I had lost!"

Verse 24: "'This son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry."

So we have a lost and found sheep—and a party; a lost and found coin—and a party; a lost and found son—and a party.

He is saying: I welcome sinners because I am the incarnation of God's love pursuing the lost. I am the shepherd seeking the sheep. I am the woman seeking her coin. And this meal that we

are eating together is a little bit of what is happening in heaven right now, and a foretaste of the joy that is coming. When sinners turn from their sin and accept my fellowship as the joy of their lives, they have come home to God. And God is glad.

So, we have discovered the common thread of all three parables.

However, the third parable has much more to say beyond the common context of the three parables as a whole unit of teaching and it is important to see this because it addresses the very nature of the hearts of the hypocrites who obviously have not repented. As Jesus said at another time, you have your reward already. What was it? It was the temporal praise of men. 11* ¶ And He said, "A man had two sons.12* "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them.

The story begins with an element of shame and disrespect.

We know that there are three characters in the story: a father and two sons. One is younger and one is older. From the very beginning of this story we see the cultural norms of the day being disregarded. This would be shocking to the audience of Jesus day, especially the hypocrites who prided themselves on tradition as a matter of honor if not life itself.

A younger son would never ask his father for his inheritance. This would be equal to saying I consider you dead so where is my rightful inheritance. This would be shameful behavior.

Equally disturbing would be the fact that the father would never give in to a son's demand, especially that of a younger son.

So we see pictured a rebellious son but even worse an unusual father who is acting shamefully.

13* "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

The first step of rebellion leads to the next for the younger son and he now sets out to distance himself from his father and takes all of his possessions and goes to a distant country. He just does not move across town, he goes as far away as he can from the father's possible influence. And once he does he wastes what he was given to him with reckless abandon. It is not difficult to imagine this even today. How many of us or our own children have done the same thing. Free to be myself, free from the parents and free from God. The young son is the very essence of not only wayward youth but of every natural man, of every sinner bound by his or her wicked nature as they are mastered by what enslaves them, regardless of who they shame or show disrespect for along the way of indulging in their sin.

14* "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished.15* "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16* "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

Reckless abandon has its price and now he has nothing in a land of famine. He now engages in another shameful act by working for a Gentile and coming into contact with swine and their food, an animal that is unclean to the Jew. He is so hungry that he would eat pig food.

17* "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!

18* 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;19* I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."

It sometimes takes the worst condition in a person's life to bring them to their senses or at least some sensibility. Many people stop drinking and taking drugs or being prostitutes or gang members because it somehow seems sensible and right but it does nothing to bring them into a relationship with God.

This son has a sense of repentance but only in a Jewish sense of works righteousness.

Though he is truly sorry he is offering his repentance to be restored as a hired hand relying on the goodness of his father. I'll work my way from now on as a hired man.

The son is making the terms for his restoration with his father. Although there is a sense of humility it is works righteousness. He would do what he could to earn regard from his father.

20* "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Up he goes to return home to his father but before he gets there his father sees him from a distance and has compassion for him and does a truly shameful thing. His father sees him a long way off which indicates the father's actually been waiting for him, hoping for him, suffering in silence in his absence, loving him even while he's gone. He runs to the rebellious son and embraces him. This would be unthinkable in Jewish society, especially for a landowner of prominence who had been so shamed by this son.

I don't know how far he ran or who would have seen him. Certainly his workers would have seen him do this. Nevertheless, he extends himself to the son and now receives him as a son, not a rebellious son but as a true son with all the affection a father could demonstrate with embracing arms and a kiss.

21* "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'22* "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23* and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;24*for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

Now we see a different attitude in the son. Based upon what the father had one for the son we see genuine repentance from the son. The father prepares a celebration because of the repentant son. The son is given the full privileges of being a son.

This is the common thread of all three parables as we stated earlier - being lost and being

found followed by great joy in heaven.

Verse 6: "Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost!"

Verse 9: "Rejoice with me for I have found the coin which I had lost!"

Verse 24: "'This son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry."

But now we come to the principle teaching of this parable.

We must remember that Jesus is being confronted by the Pharisees and scribes when He teaches these parables.

25* "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.26* "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.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 became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him.

Here we witness another shameful event. The older son has no concern for the younger brothers change of heart. He is angry that his brother would receive such gracious treatment. He would not go in and rejoice. He had no love for his brother or genuine love for his father. He must have been in the field a long while. A party like this one did not happen on the spot. People were summoned to come, the calf had to be killed and at least the cooking had to begin. Musicians had to be acquired and so on. It is not like the son would have been engaged in hard labor and did not hear or notice the activity for a such a large event. He was the owner's son and at best would have only supervised the work.

29* "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends;30* but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'

Anger, bitterness, jealousy and the heart of a legalist belong to this son.

Just as the so-called rich young ruler proclaimed that he had never disobeyed the Commandments, this man lies in the same way. No one has ever been completely obedient to every command of a father.

This son is the truly lost one. Anyone who would not rejoice over the genuine repentance of a sinner is one who is a religious hypocrite. This son is just like the Pharisees and the scribes and all religious hypocrites who believe that their good works and their own sense of righteousness as compared to others should be acceptable to God, the Father. You never did anything special for me. I was the obedient son. A truly obedient son would not hold anger and bitterness against the father. He would obey from love not duty and not expecting anything in return because he was already sharing in the good things from the father.

31* "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.

This son was lacking for nothing.

Even when Israel did not have true hearts for God but just an outward fulfilling of duty by keeping the Law, God kept them so that He would preserve a remnant.

One proof of being a true son of God is that one rejoices when a sinner repents.

The Pharisees and scribes were all enraptured with their theater of piety and had no concern for the sinners and even less when it seemed that they may be influenced toward repentance because of Jesus' teaching because they despised Him.

Matthew 9:10* Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.11* When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?"12* But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

13* "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

And then the father says:

32* "But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."

So, we must ask the question which attitude of heart is yours? Is it like the father's or is it like the son's.

There are so many people who do not see their need of repentance because they are like the older son who pictures the Pharisees and scribes. They do obedience in some way to a religion or religious activity and when someone truly repents and shows forth a changed heart and is a different person it makes them feel uncomfortable because they do not have zeal for Christ or for His Word or for His people. They are satisfied with their ritual and good works because nothing really has to change inside. External obedience and being a good person will take them to heaven. And worse, we have religious extremists and among them those who are so self and Satanically deceived that they believe that murdering people pleases God.

There are people who say they accepted Christ when a child or some other time and yet live their lives in direct opposition to the Word of God and live in rebellion thinking that a decision for Jesus will save them in the end. Now, their sin may not be as reckless and visible as the younger brothers sin. It may have been hidden like the older brothers sin. The sins of anger, bitterness, jealousy and other attitudes of the heart are not any less sin than the whoring of the younger brother. Self-righteousness will condemn you to hell as will any other sin. When these kinds of people are confronted about their sin they shrug it off and rely on their self-righteousness. These people are just as deluded as the religious extremist and the Pharisees and scribes and often are the legalists in the church who cause many of its problems.

Believing they are healthy they do not need a physician and take offense at any suggestion that they are sinning rather than examining their hearts and repenting.

This parable is the parable of the Legalist Son - the Lost Son, not the prodigal son.

Just as the older son has no understanding of how the father could show such love for the younger son so it is with the Pharisees and scribes who could not understand but only resent the fact that Jesus cared for the sinners because it was an affront to their legalistic sense of ritual and piety.

Just as many of our churches want to play it safe and not reach out to the so called worst kind of sinners in the community, these churches are no better than the unloving and uncompassionate brother or Pharisees and scribes.

How do you react to whores, drug addicts, alcoholics, welfare people and homosexuals? I am not asking you how they react to you if you attempt to show them the compassion and love of Christ. You may very well be laughed at or worse. How do you react to them? How do you view them?

This series of parables clearly teaches that the Father has sent Jesus to seek and to save those who are lost. We learn that the Father extends Himself to those who need to repent and as He does something for them first, then when someone understands what the Father has done first, genuine repentance comes. We only love him because He first loved us. We also learn that there is joy in heaven when one truly repents. And a legalist who thinks you earn your way to heaven doesn't understand that God's joy is found in justifying the ungodly, that God's joy is found in forgiving the sinner who is bankrupt and has nothing just like the younger brother who comes to the father with nothing.

He is met by the Father first and so it is for all who will be called as sons of God. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed. Because of the love of the Father we are prompted to repent of our sin by the work of regeneration and we are given the gifts of repentance and faith. Because of His compassion we see ourselves for what we are and gladly repent with no expectation of anything but the promise of God's forgiveness, which brings eternal life.

We also learn that the legalist is one whose sin may not be a visible crime like whoring but the religious hypocrite is self-gratifying, self-serving, self-satisfied and full of pride and all of them are products of self deceit which only leads to condemnation.

This was Paul the apostle at one time. In Philippians 3:4-7 he says, 4* ¶ although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:5* circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6* as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.7* But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. In Acts 26:9-11 he testifies, 9* "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile

to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.10* "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.11* "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

What is your relationship with the Father? Is it a cold and heartless one like the older son or is it one that is evident of genuine repentance and a love for the Father and a love for those whom the Father loves?

PAGE

PAGE 9

Luke 15:11-32 First Baptist Evans Aug. 13,2006 Pastor Joseph Krygier