

The Prodigal Son - Part 1: The Younger Son

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[0 : 00] Please take your copy of God's Word, which I hope that you have with you, that it's well read and treasured in your heart, and turn with me to the book of Luke chapter 15.

If you've been part of our fellowship for very long, it might be a little unsettling to you that we're turning to the middle of a book of the Bible. Well, as last week we concluded our, I think, 59 sermon study of the book of Acts. We started in February of 2016 and finished up last week.

Many people have asked me, what's next? Where are we headed? What are we doing? So I'm going to tell you that. I'll give you the plan, at least the penciled-in plan for the rest of the year, so you can take a couple deep breaths and just enjoy being here with us on Sunday mornings and hearing God's Word expounded as we study it together.

So today and the next two weeks, we're going to look at chapter 15 of Luke. It's been three weeks on the story of the prodigal son. The five following weeks, we're going to do a topical exposition of the five solas of the Reformation.

So we're headed up to 500th year anniversary. You heard me telling that to the children earlier. The five solas were kind of like the banner cries of the Reformation.

[1 : 24] And I want to be really clear, just as a little primer to looking to that in just a couple of weeks, that Christianity did not begin with the Reformation. It began much, much further before that.

And there were groups of people that managed, right? The truth of God went forth and managed to skirt even around what the Reformers were reforming from.

But we don't want to neglect our family history, right? And the Reformation is part of that. We stand on the shoulders of many of the Reformers who helped, in large measure, recapture biblical doctrine for us.

And so the solas help us to think about those things. A sola, if you're not aware, is Latin, and it means only. So those five solas are sola scriptura, only scripture.

Sola gratia, only grace. Sola fide, only faith. Sola Christus, only Christ. And soli deo gloria, to God alone be the glory.

[2 : 24] And so you can think of it in these terms. By scripture alone do we know that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. So we'll spend five weeks on the solas.

Four weeks beyond that, we're just going to do some various text and topics, likely from the Psalms. And then the rest of the year, as we've done in many years past, we'll preach through the Advent candle themes.

We're not preaching candles, but they're hope, joy, peace, love, Christ. And we light those candles together, leading up to keeping our minds fixed on why we celebrate Christmas.

And we'll open up texts that speak of those various privileges we have in Christ and expound through them. So that's where we're going across the rest of the year.

But today we are in Luke chapter 15. And I'm going to read the entire chapter for our benefit before we narrow in on verses 11 through 19 this morning.

[3 : 29] But all of it carries together. So I want to read it all to you probably over the next few weeks as well. We'll read it together at the beginning and then we'll narrow in on some verses from the text.

Before I read, I want to remind you that this is God's word to us, that it was written for his glory and for our good. And as such, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Beginning in verse 1 of Luke chapter 15. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats

with them.

So he told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

[4 : 37] Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

And he said, There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there squandered his property in reckless living.

And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

[5 : 46] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger?

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

[6 : 58] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 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.

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him. And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. The contemporary pastor and commentator, John MacArthur, has called the story of the prodigal son the greatest short story ever told.

I agree. This story has been often cited, and it exists in the collective consciousness of our culture. You will hear, and if you haven't already been aware of this, you will begin to hear mention of the story of the prodigal son in all sorts of places.

[8 : 19] But, this story is often misunderstood. It is my prayer that over the next couple of weeks, we will arrive at a clearer understanding of its meaning as we study it together.

This story is primarily told by Jesus in order to address the attitudes of the religious elite, who Luke tells us about at the beginning of chapter 15.

Verse 2 says, And the Pharisees and scribes grumbled. Those lawyers and those of this elite class called the Pharisees. And what did they say? This man receives sinners and eats with them.

So in response, Luke records what Jesus said. Verse 3, that he told them this parable, and then continues. Verse 8, Or what woman? And then without skipping a beat, to verse 11.

And he said, There was a man who had two sons. So we need to see that it connects back to the very beginning of chapter 15 and this conflict that's going on and this type of judgmentalism that the Pharisees and the scribes have for Jesus, who is gathering with those who need to hear the good news of the coming kingdom of God.

[9 : 37] Now as we look at any of Jesus' parables, but I think particularly this one, there's a great temptation to allegorize the parables, to make everything in the text take on some complex symbolic meaning.

If you just have some time to kill, go search for explanations of symbolism and the prodigal son. You will find some crazy explanations out there.

We need to be really careful across these three weeks to see that Jesus is driving a solitary point. He's heading us to a particular thing that he wants us to understand.

And that is this. He is juxtaposing the attitudes of the Pharisees and the scribes with the rejoicing of heaven over lost souls being found.

That's what the drive is. The rejoicing of heaven and therefore the need for our rejoicing in the lost being found.

[10 : 39] We need to keep this in mind as we consider the story of the prodigal son. It sits within a chapter of parables with an even larger cultural reality.

And we need to do some faithful work to understand its meaning and bearing on us today. So, I'm going to break across these next three weeks the characters out.

So, we're going to look at the younger son who we'll call the prodigal the prodigal son the father and then the eldest son who we'll see as really the point of the story this attitude of the eldest son.

But for today we'll look at the youngest son the younger of the two and with fair ease as we look at the prodigal we can find ourselves in him.

In some measure. The word prodigal means licentious or lavish. It's not a word we tend to use very often unless you hear it in reference to this particular story.

[11 : 41] Or as the ESV translation puts it as I'm reading from in verse 13 reckless. Luke records the ESV text that he went and squandered his inheritance and reckless living.

The prodigal son is prodigal he is reckless in his sin in his rebellion against his father. Now there are various stages in the history of a sinner.

And this is true of the prodigal and these stages are worth noting in this text for our benefit. This is especially important for you this morning if you have not believed in Jesus Christ.

To take a look at the stages these history stages in the life of the prodigal. But if you have believed do not think that a careful consideration of who you once were is a fruitless effort.

It is always good to remember the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ. For me to remember that I was once prodigal but that I have been restored to my father.

[12 : 55] To be reminded of what we were saved from makes us revel in who we have been saved to. So let's do that together in the following outlines.

Here is the outline for this morning and then I will go back to it. Number one independence from God. Number two indulgence of self.

And number three insanity of soul. So these are the stages in this history of the sinner that we can observe here in the text of the prodigal son.

And then fourthly for those of us who are in Christ who have been justified before God we can readily relate with this fourth step and I hope that this will be a true step for each and every one of us repentance and faith.

So number one independence from God. Verses 11 and 12 and he said there was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to his father father give me the share of property that is coming to me and he divided his property between them.

[14 : 04] We first learn of a man who has two sons. Inheritance in Jesus' day was governed by the law of primogenitor. You don't have to remember that word but there it is for you right this law that governed the way in which inheritance was handed down and it was strictly adhered to.

The eldest son under this law received a double portion of the inheritance which means in the case of two sons that the older son would receive two thirds of the inheritance and the younger one third. You get to learn math on Sunday mornings as well. Upon the request of his inheritance the father not only grants the younger brother what he asked for but also the older he also grants it.

It says and he divided his property between them. The fact that he does this bears a great deal of significance later on. This morning what we need to understand about the prodigal's request is that it was audacious.

Under this law of inheritance the inheritance was only granted upon the death of the father. There was no pre-granting of inheritance under the law.

[15:18] So the younger son in requesting his inheritance was wishing his father dead. So remember Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and the scribes as he's telling this story and this is their first gasping moment in the telling of this thing right out of the gate.

Greatest short story ever told. They are in awe. How could a son ask such a thing of his father? I wish you were dead.

Give me what is mine. And this is the nature of sin. Rejection of God's good loving rule.

The pastor John Piper once defined sin like this. Sin is the glory of God not honored the holiness of God not revered the greatness of God not admired the power of God not praised the truth of God not sought the wisdom of God not esteemed the beauty of God not treasured the goodness of God not savored the faithfulness of God not trusted the promise of God not believed the commandments of God not obeyed the justice of God not respected the wrath of God not feared the grace of God not cherished the presence of God not prized and the person of God not loved in our sin we say to God I wish you were dead and we can observe the prodigal's expression of sin in the very first sin found in Genesis chapter 3 and I begin reading in verse 1 now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made he said to the woman did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden and the woman said to the serpent we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden neither shall you touch it lest you die and here's the crafty deception verse 4 but the serpent said to the woman woman you will not surely die for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil what was the deception of the devil that Adam and Eve could themselves be gods

Adam and Eve in their very first sin the start of all of our problems was that they wanted God dead they themselves wanted to be God verse 6 says so when the woman saw the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise she took of its fruit and ate and she she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate Adam and Eve said to their father God father give us the share of property that is coming to us they wished they wished God dead they sought independence from God and his good rule over them just as the prodigal son desired independence from his father as this should be a shock to us it should be if you're not feeling that as a shock I pray that God would stir in your heart recognize the offense of sin as it should be a shock to us that the younger son would ask that it would have been even greater to Jesus listeners in a culture where honor was massively important and the fifth command and honor your father and mother was not only part of the moral law but also the judicial law this request was more than just a little scandalous listen to the law found in

[19:13] Deuteronomy chapter 21 verses 18 through 21 this is the command against rebellious children children you should listen to this if a man is a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother and though they discipline him will not listen to them then his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives and they shall say to the elders of his city this our son is stubborn and rebellious he will not obey our voice he is a glutton and a drunkard then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones so you shall purge the evil from your midst and all Israel shall hear and fear so the command to obey your father and mother was serious and God meant it when he said it so in this culture insolence was a serious infraction young people you did not get to yell

I hate you and slam the door to your room and your parents just don't know how they lost you as a friend you were meant to honor your mother and your father and while the instruction of Deuteronomy 21 was rarely followed please know that very few sons were stoned to death because they knew what was coming to them if they weren't obedient a son like the prodigal would be publicly shamed and disowned here however what does the father do he does something that's so surprising and again we don't understand it as a culture but what does the father do instead of public shaming him and disowning him the father divides his property between them gives them exactly what he asked for we have sought the same we have said to God in our willful rebellion

against God's good instruction whether we know it from the pages of scripture or whether just the law that's written on our hearts we have all rebelled against God and wished him dead we have all sought independence from our good father we have all wanted ourselves to be gods so this is a stage in the history of every sinner as we see it in the stage of the prodigal independence is a desire for independence from God but secondly we see another stage we see the indulgence of self just in verse 13 we see that not many days later the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country and there he squandered his property in reckless living so the son leaves which appears to have been his plan all along as Jesus states not many days later the son took a couple of days to liquidate his inheritance to take all of the things that have been given to him the livestock and the land to liquidate it into transportable cash needed to take it with him recall that Jesus is speaking to this Jewish audience so the statement that the son took a journey into a far country while to us that just sounds like well he took a trip would have been understood to be a journey to Gentile lands again the next gasping moment for his listeners to Jesus listeners there is a compounding audacity of the son going to live among unclean people to carry out unclean motives recall that people in Jesus' day when they returned to Jerusalem would go straight to the temple to be cleansed of the uncleanness of Gentile lands so this is an audacious thing that this young man has gone to do he takes the inheritance that the father granted him and he spends it on himself he spends it on his desires we find out from the older son later in the text that he spends it on prostitutes he does not seek to do good with it but rather indulges his every whim earlier in Luke's narrative we find this in chapter 12 you may want to turn there with me to verse 13 Luke records another parable that similarly drives at this point being made verse 13 Luke records someone in the crowd said to him teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me we can presume that the inheritance has been granted at this point the father has died but Jesus says to him man who made me a judge or arbiter over you and then he says to them perceiving the motivation of this young man take care and be on your guard against all covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions and he told them a parable saying the land of a rich man produced plentifully and he thought to himself what shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops and he said I will do this I will tow down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods and I will say to my soul soul you have ample goods laid up for many years relax eat drink be merry but God so so so so the sinner indulges in self right and and not just financially although that's what we see this young man doing right but in everything they seek their own pleasure not the glory of God or the good of their fellow man and we have all been selfish in this way seeking our good seeking our gain seeking our pleasure right we've rejected God we want to live in independence from him and we have indulged the sinfulness of our flesh Paul writes to

[25 : 33] Titus in Titus 3 3 for we ourselves were once foolish disobedient led astray slaves to various passions and pleasures passing our days in malice and envy hated by others and hating one another so we did see the stage in the history of this young man indulging the self and we have all been and are still at times guilty of the very same third stage we see is insanity of soul verses 14 through 16 and when he had spent everything a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need just as an aside this is a parable clearly so Jesus is just telling the story so we don't as I said before we don't want to extrapolate too much out of it but had this happened

I would just like to suggest that this famine the severe famine was a providence of God for the benefit of this young man so the severe famine arise in the country he has nothing left and he begins to be in need verse 15 so he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs and he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything so Jesus next tells us here the young man spent all of his inheritance and found himself in a desperate spot as there's a famine in the land and they are fleeing we don't know how long he spends in the land in Jesus parable right but it doesn't seem to be very long right in reckless living he spends it all and finds himself in a desperate place the author of the book of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11 25 that Moses chose rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures!

! He experiences the temporal pleasure of sin in a very stark way He ventures rapidly from reckless living to abject poverty and his sin has placed him in a dreadful spot If you have not believed in Christ I pray that you would repent and believe before you find yourself in such a place The prodigal becomes a keeper of pigs which I think to us has some resonation sounds kind of horrible to me but

it would have been additionally shocking to Jesus Jewish hearers remember to the Jews in this day and now for many the pig was an unclean animal so not only is he in an unclean land doing unclean things now he's caring for he's the caretaker of an unclean animal the prodigal is further forsaking his father and his nationality and he's become so desperately hungry that he desires to eat something that could never satisfy

Jesus said he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate these pods if you look at the Greek you can understand that they would have been carob pods the carob plant has very little use although if you are into cooking you can grind carob seeds into something that's like a replacement for chocolate it's kind of interesting but it's not an attractive thing here!

[29 : 26] it's a really hardy plant so in the midst of this famine it seems that this is a plant that would have survived and it produced these tough leathery pod shells long shells that contain within it a really hard bean this carob pod is barely digestible for pigs so remember this is a famine and pigs will just eat anything but they're being fed these!

pod! So catch what Jesus is saying here this man is finding himself in such a desperate place that he wants to eat something that he knows full well will not be nourishing to him he's that desperate that soul sick that he's looking to something that is not the answer to his issue this is the way of sin seeking to be satisfied with that which will never satisfy and this is an insanity of the soul we are offered abundant satisfaction in relationship with God but we have turned and are possibly turning to worthless things God writes through the pen of the prophet Jeremiah chapter 2 verses 12 to 13 be appalled oh heavens at this be shocked be utterly desolate declares the Lord for my people have committed two evils they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters and hewed out cisterns for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water so they have given up that thing which truly satisfies is the first evil to rather try to be satisfied with an impossibility Paul expresses the same in Romans chapter 1 verses 21 through 22 for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks Christian you have been delivered from such futility by the grace of God rejoice in him as you remember what you have been delivered and spared from this insanity of soul if you have not placed believing faith in

Jesus Christ this morning take a moment to consider the prodigal and his desperate state he surely would have died had he stayed in this state Jesus concludes this portion of the text with a statement and no one gave him anything he had left the goodness of his father's house to find himself desperately lost in a foreign land if you are not in Christ this morning whether you recognize it or not you find yourself in the very same state listen to the words of Charles Spurgeon who was a 19th century British Baptist pastor one of my favorites you'll learn and this is found on the front of your bulletin if you'd like to follow it along he wrote this in a sermon on the prodigal son on this portion of the parable of the prodigal son he wrote this if you must play the fool I think the preference would be that we would never be fools but if you must play the fool take some lighter things to trifle with than your souls and your eternal destinies right he's saying be a fool about things that don't really matter but don't be a fool about these things he says shut yourselves up alone for a while go through the matter steadily lay it out in order make a plan of it see where you are going he encouraged us earlier in the sermon to actually write to write it out actually take the time to consider the state of your soul and then to consider the goodness of God to us in Christ he says see where you are going think over the way of salvation the story of the cross the love of God the readiness of Christ to save find in the prodigal yourself and then I hope

I pray turn to God in repentance and faith so fourthly repentance and faith I'm so glad the story goes here verse 17 but when he came to himself he said how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread but I perish here with hunger I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him father I have sinned against heaven and before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son treat me as one of your hired servants praise God that the prodigal of Jesus story does not stay in this desperate state let us learn from that but Jesus says he came to himself and that is to say that he returned to his right mind right he recognized the goodness of his father he remembered that even his father's hired servants had more than enough bread and that he was being foolish to stay where he was and perish with hunger so he makes a plan he decides to go back to his father humbly admitting!

[34 : 56] the error of his way saying I have sinned against heaven and before you recognizing that he has said to his father I wish you were dead seeing that that was wrong and repenting before his father and being willing to live once again under his father's good instruction you see that that he is

turning from his wickedness and he is turning back to his father saying it is good to be in my father's house he doesn't have the expectation that he will get to live as a son but he is willing to live as a servant to be under his father's good care the prodigal turns from his wickedness the foolishness and error of his way we call this repentance and he turns to his father believing that his father will be good to him and this is the prodigal's faith believes in who his father is and that he will care for him we will see next week the loving kindness of the father toward the son it is my favorite part of the parable we will see that as the son returns in repentance and faith the father becomes humble himself in order to love his son and to spare him from his deserved punishment the father takes on the son's shame to restore him to sonship and there is much rejoicing dear listener if you have not humbled yourself before God recognizing that you have sought independence from him as you have lived in a state of indulgence of self and that if you are not already there you risk an insanity of your soul my plea to you this morning is flee to Christ let this day be a day of repentance and faith that there will be a great rejoicing in heaven over the salvation of your soul beloved those of us who are in Christ we have much to rejoice in having been delivered having all once been the prodigal and now being called sons of the most high

God in closing God through the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 43 verses 6 and 7 I will say to the north give up and to the south do not withhold bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth everyone who was called by my name whom I created for my glory whom I formed and made let's pray together