

## **PARABLES: The Greatest Stories Ever Told**

Parable of the Prodigal Son

Jodi Hickerson

July 24, 2016

Discussion Notes

The Crossing Church

Las Vegas, Nevada

### **OPENING**

Stories have a way of sticking with us, and Jesus knew that. He would often tell stories to help the people understand who God is, who Jesus is, and who we are. He used stories to help us understand the Kingdom of God and what God values most. Jesus used fascinating stories to illustrate spiritual truths. These were stories that challenged cultural norms, shook up the religious elite, and baffled people from all walks of life. They are called parables and over the next few weeks we are going to look at the greatest stories ever told.

### **SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>**

**Luke 15:11-32** “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 servants 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 servants.’ 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. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ “

### **OBSERVATION**

The Prodigal Son parable shows the nature of repentance and the Lord’s willingness to welcome and bless all who return to Him. Jesus told this parable to show us a forgiving father whose love remains constant throughout as he restores a son into fellowship with him. The Father is, of course, God Himself, the younger son represents sinners, and the older son has all of the characteristics of the Pharisees. When the prodigal son returns and appears in the distance, his father runs to him just as God runs to embrace us when we repent. The older son was respectably religious and outwardly lived a blameless life, but

---

<sup>1</sup> All scripture listed is NIV unless otherwise indicated

harbored anger and lack of love in his heart. He didn't love his father or his brother and was jealous of the younger brother's treatment upon his return.

**Question:** When have you had friends who turned away from God? What did you do to help them find their way back?

### **APPLICATION**

Repentance is shown here as a journey and ends with the son grieving for what he had done and blaming only himself for his condition. He returned trusting in his father's love to do something to help him. The main character in this parable is the father who represents our Heavenly Father. The father gives his son the inheritance and realizes that this implies the son wishes he were dead. God allows rebellious sinners to go their own way, as well, because He wants us to love and remain in Him by choice. Both fathers run to embrace them when they repent and return.

**Question:** Why did the father give his son the inheritance?

The sinner's course is a season of indulgence, then misery, repentance, and forgiveness. Sooner or later sin fails to satisfy and a sense of want brings crises into our lives. The younger son represents all sinners or every one of us! He yearned to be independent of his father just as sinners yearn to escape the authority of God and live a wild life. He was a sinner, openly irreligious, childish and easily deceived. So he left and lived in sin without accountability until catastrophe occurred in the form of a famine and all of his associates left him. But when he returns, he demonstrates humility, repentance, and self-blame.

**Question:** Tell us about a time when you rebelled against God. What were the consequences? What made you come to your senses?

**Question:** Compare the younger son's journey back to God with your own.

**Question:** Tell us about a time when you had difficulties and your friends abandoned you. How did that feel?

The older son was the rule keeper and represents the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Priests or The Law. He had no joy as compared to the joy of angels when his brother repents and returns to his father. He had remained with at home the whole time his brother was gone, faithfully working in the fields and being obedient, yet he continued to rebel against his condition until he became the second lost son. He refused to join in the celebration that welcomed his brother back home, even though he still had his inheritance. He is screaming, "This is unfair!" because he doesn't understand that our works don't earn us anything. He demonstrates self-righteousness, anger, pride, jealousy, lack of compassion, self-centeredness, and arrogance.

**Question:** Why did the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Priests want to kill Jesus? Compare their motives to those of the older son.

The three parables that Jesus told in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel deal with lost items: one coin out of ten, one sheep out of one hundred, and two sons. All are valuable to God because they are lost and need restoration.

**Question:** Which son are you today? When were you the other son?

### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, we have sinned against heaven and against You. We recognize ourselves in the two sons of this parable, sometimes rebelling against your sovereignty and other times repenting and asking for forgiveness. Help us to be steadfast in our faithfulness and guardians of the door to the Kingdom of Heaven so that others can find their way to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.