

51. Jesus Taught About the Repentant Son

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that there is great joy in heaven when even one sinner repents and places his or her faith in the payment that Jesus made for their sin. We also want to help our children understand why the tax collectors and sinners wanted to hear more of the teaching of Jesus. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus made this lesson very personal for each of the tax collectors and sinners that were there that day as Jesus shared with them the response of the father when his son repented.

In this parable, we see that a man had two sons and the younger son made the choice to waste his life and his money with sinful living. Luke 15:11-13 says, “Then He said: ‘A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to *his* father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me.*’ So he divided to them *his* livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.’” We actually see that this younger son was a very rebellious son. Many parents have had similar sons and daughters. However, we are going to see that this Father is a picture of God and His love for all people.

An inheritance is normally not given until after the death of the father. However, that was not the way it happened in this case. We see that one day the younger son said to his father, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.” The father did not have to honor this choice, because he was still alive. However, the father in his love allowed the son to make that choice, even though the father knew that it was the wrong choice. God is a loving Father who realizes that many people will only turn to Him after they have nearly destroyed their lives. As a result, the father honored the request of the son and gave him the inheritance that he would have received in the future.

A few days later, the younger son took his entire inheritance and left for a far country. Here, we see that he wanted to get as far away from his father as possible. When the son reached the far country, we see that he wasted his possessions with prodigal living. The word translated “wasted” means *to scatter abroad*. This word was used of God in Luke 1:51 where we read, “He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts.” Here, we see that God scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. The word is translated “wasting” in Luke 16:1 where we read, “He also said to His disciples: ‘There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.’”

The word translated “prodigal” means *a wild, sinful life filled with immorality*. Another form of this word is used in Ephesians 5:18 where we read, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Here, we see that the word speaks of the wild partying that goes along with excessive drinking. That kind of living can quickly use up an entire inheritance. We see that is exactly what happened.

Luke 15:14-19 says, “But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him

into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*. But when he came to himself, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”” The day came when this young man had nothing left. At the same time, a severe famine came into that land. The word translated “famine” speaks of a scarcity of harvest. This was a very severe famine, which meant that there was a great shortage of food.

This young man began to suffer because of the lack of food. Finally, he was forced to go and find any job that was available to get some money so that he could buy some food. The only job that he could find was feeding pigs. Since the Jews knew that pigs were unclean animals, this was the worst imaginable job any Jewish person could take. He was so starved that he even tried to fill his stomach with the carob pods that he was feeding to the pigs. Carob pods cannot be digested by the human body so they did nothing to satisfy his hunger. At the same time, no one even gave him any food.

One of the things that happened in the pigpen was that this young man suddenly had a lot of time to think. It was while he was thinking in the pigpen that this young man finally came to his senses. He began to think about his father and his home. He realized that his father treated his hired servants with kindness. They had more than enough food. In contrast, this young man realized that he could soon perish from hunger. The word translated “perish” means *to destroy, to be lost or to be ruined*. In fact, it is the word that Jesus used to describe the goal of Satan in John 10:10 where we read, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” In this verse, the word is translated “destroy”.

The son then made the choice to humble himself before his father. He made the choice to make the long journey home and tell his father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” First, notice that this son realized that his primary sin was against God. David realized this same thing when he said, in Psalm 51:4, “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in Your sight--that You may be found just when You speak, *and* blameless when You judge.” Second, this son realized that he had also sinned against his father. He felt that he was no longer worthy. The word translated “worthy” means *to have weight or value*. He did not even deserve to be called a son any longer. As a result, the young man planned to ask his father if he would be willing to make him a hired servant. We see that rebellion had been replaced by repentance.

Luke 15:20-24 says, “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” But the father said to his servants, “Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” And

they began to be merry.’” It is in this part of the parable that we see that the father gives us a beautiful picture of God.

The young man began the long walk back to his father. When he still was a long way from the house, his father saw him. This meant that the father was frequently looking toward the road watching for his son to return. We also see that the father had compassion. The word translated “compassion” means *to be deeply moved from within*. This word is used of Jesus in Mark 6:34, where we read, “And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.” The compassion of Jesus caused Him to teach the people so they could come to the True Shepherd.

Because of the compassion the father felt for his son, he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. The son then spoke to the father and told him that he had sinned against God and against his father. He also said that he was no longer worthy to be called his son. However, the father stopped the son before he could even ask his father to hire him as a hired servant. This is a real picture of the great love that God has for us. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” Then, Romans 8:14-16 adds, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” When we repent of our sin of unbelief, we become the children of God.

However, the father did much more than just speak words. The father also took actions to restore the son. He told the servants to bring out the best robe and put it on him. When we became a Christian, we received the robe of righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Then, the father said to put a ring on his hand. The ring was what showed the authority of the family; the family ring was used to sign official documents and letters.

The father also said to put sandals on his feet. Notice he had walked home with no shoes or sandals. Slaves did not normally wear sandals but sons did so this also showed that the father recognized him as a son. Ephesians 6:15 says, “And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” However, the greatest picture is the picture of the joy of the father. He told the servants to bring the fatted calf that had been saved for a special event and kill it so that there could be a celebration feast. He said that his son had been dead and was now alive. God gave us spiritual life at the moment of salvation. The son had been lost and now he was found. Then, they began to celebrate. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the great joy that God had at the time that they became Christians and that there was great rejoicing in heaven. This speaks of the greatness of the love of the Father for every person and His joy at the salvation of each one who comes to Him. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain how this parable shows the greatness of the love of God.