

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

## A Cultural Study of God's Grace

Luke 15:11-32

**Keywords:** God, Jesus, Luke, parable, prodigal son

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**Sermon Audio Blurb:** The parable of the prodigal son historically has been understood to be about the son and his repentance. Elder Mike Reeves turns our attention to the actual focus of the story – the father. Mike provides a cultural study of the parable in order to better understand Christ's description of God's grace and His mission on earth.

- I. Introduction
  - a. Please turn in your bibles to Luke 15
  - b. Today we will be looking at the parable commonly known as the Prodigal Son
  
- II. Traditional Views of the Parable of the Prodigal Son
  - a. A story about the son and his redemption
  - b. A story about a son being allowed to learn a hard lesson in order to obey
  - c. A story about a backslidden son who repents and the father rejoices
  - d. These traditional views typically only focus on the younger son and not on the other characters in the story
  - e. Actual View – A glorious picture of the Father's grace and love for sinners
    - i. Some bibles label this parable of the **Compassionate Father**
  
- III. Today's approach starts with understanding the cultural aspects of the story
  - a. Luke 15:11-32 is a "pericope"
    - i. It means "self-contained unit"
    - ii. Meaning that in order to understand any verse from a story, you must understand the entire story
    - iii. You must understand the entire story of the father and his two sons in order to best understand Christ's message.
  
- IV. The setting (15:1-2)
  - a. Tax collectors and sinners are coming to hear Him speak
  - b. The Pharisees and Scribes begin grumbling in the midst of these crowds
  - c. He was "receiving and eating with them"
    - i. Table fellowship in the middle east is a serious matter
    - ii. To invite someone to a meal was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood, and/or forgiveness
      1. In short, sharing a meal was sharing life
    - iii. Typically "lesser" people are invited to dinner as a gesture of generosity
      1. They are invited but do not eat with the host

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

2. It is a meal of acceptance but not honor
- iv. “Receiving” guests means that the host eats with those people
  1. Eating with tax collectors and sinners would mean that honor was being bestowed upon them
  2. Jesus eating with sinners was an expression of his mission on earth
    - a. Luke 5:27-32
  3. Eating with sinners was an expression of His redeeming love for sinners
- d. Christ responds to them with 3 parables
  - i. The word “So” in verse 3 speaks to the fact that Jesus was responding to the complaints of the Pharisees in the midst of the people who came to hear Him
  - ii. The parables in this section of Luke is not a presentation of the gospel but a defense of the gospel
  - iii. The Lost Sheep (v. 3-7)
    1. The shepherd who seeks to find a lost sheep and rejoices upon finding them
    2. A picture of God’s pursuit of sinners
  - iv. The Lost Coin (v.8-10)
    1. A woman who loses a silver coin and searches her entire house until she finds and then rejoices with her friend and neighbors over finding what was lost
    2. The value of God redeeming sinners
  - v. In these first two parables He clearly states why He “receives and eats with sinners” – to seek and save that which was lost
- V. The Compassionate Father
  - a. The salvific status of the two sons
    - i. It is pretty clear to see that the father in this parable is not God, but a symbol for Him
      1. Therefore the status of the two brothers must be agreed upon
      2. I think the traditional (but inaccurate) understandings of this parable assume the younger son to be a Christian
        - a. Are they both saved? They are called sons
        - b. Or are they not saved but simply considered “God’s children”?
        - c. I land on the second view – they are both sinners
          - i. The key for me was understanding the relationships of the sons to the father
      3. This parable details broken relationships and the father’s desire to restore them
        - a. We as Christians are justified in God’s eyes and our relationship is not broken and can never be
        - b. I believe that it is about God and his relationships to sinners and the self-righteous

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

- b. Walk through of the parable
- c. The younger son asks for his share of his father's estate (v. 12)
  - i. In the OT, inheritances were given to children upon the father's death
  - ii. By asking for his portion of the inheritance when his father was not dying, the younger son is telling his father that **he wishes that he was dead**
  - iii. He not only asked for his inheritance, that only gives him ownership
    - 1. He asks that he gets full disposition – the right to sell the inheritance as well
  - iv. It is also remarkable how the father reacts
    - 1. He is expected to explode and physically beat the young man
    - 2. He doesn't just grant his son's wish, he divides it between both sons
  - v. Interesting point - the older son doesn't refuse his share
    - 1. He is expected to refuse the inheritance in protest of his brother's request
      - a. Middle eastern culture dictates that breaks in relationships are repaired through a 3<sup>rd</sup> party
      - b. The older son is expected to enter the discussion and take up the role of reconciler
    - 2. His response – silence
      - a. If the older brother hates his younger brother, but loves his father – he speaks up
      - b. If he loves his younger brother – he still speaks up so as to reconcile him to his father and get him to see the error of his ways
      - c. Silence indicates that his relationships are broken with both the father and brother
      - d. And he also benefits from his brother's request
- d. The younger son gathers all that he has and leaves (v. 13)
  - i. It is important to note that in the middle eastern culture, the community would now play a role in dealing with the younger son, especially given that the older brother refused to be a mediator
    - 1. His actions would've caused the village to enact a ceremony of *qesasah*
      - a. It literally means, "a cutting off"

## **Qesasah**

If a man sold his field to a Gentile, his relatives used to bring barrels full of parched corns and nuts and break them open in the presence of the children, and the children would gather them and proclaim, "So-and-so is cut off from his inheritance." And likewise if a man married a woman who was not fitting for him, his relatives used to bring barrels full or parched corn and nuts and break them open in the presence of children, and the children would gather them and proclaim, "So-and-so is lost to his family."

R. Jose b. Abin, *Ruth in Midrash Rabbah*, (London: Soncino, 1939), 87.

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

- e. The younger son squanders his wealth with a wild lifestyle (v. 13)
  - i. The verb squanders in the original text is graphic in nature, it means to scatter
  - ii. A famine occurs and he begins to be in need (v. 14)
    - 1. More than others he needed help
      - a. He is a lone Jew in a faraway land with nothing
  - iii. He seeks out a local citizen and goes to work for him (v. 15)
    - 1. He is offered the job of feeding pigs
      - a. The polite way someone from the middle east gets rid of “hangers-on” is to give them a job that they will refuse
    - 2. Surprisingly the younger son has not yet reached the end of his rope
      - a. Consider his state to this point
        - i. Broken relationship with his father
        - ii. Broken relationship with his brother
        - iii. His local village, family and friends, have shunned him
        - iv. Lives in a foreign land
        - v. Has run out of funds
        - vi. A famine has hit
        - vii. He is needs to work to try and survive
        - viii. He is given a deplorable job and has no choice but to take it
        - ix. Being that he is in a foreign land and needs to work, he more than likely cannot observe the Sabbath or practice his religion
        - x. And prior to this, he has not yet seen the error of his ways
- f. The son despairs
  - i. Longing to eat he desires eating the carob pods (v.16)
    - 1. As a food it symbolizes the need for repentance
      - a. Other writings use similar language when talking about Israel and how they’ve sinned against God
        - i. “Israel needs carob (poverty and hardship) in order to repent and forgo their evil ways”
  - ii. No one gave him anything
    - 1. The verb is in the imperfect tense meaning, “No one was giving to him”
- g. He comes to his senses (v. 17)
  - i. He resolves to return and repent (v.17-19)
    - 1. His apology offers no excuses but intends work off his sin
      - a. He wants to be treated like a slave – he wants to pay for his sins
        - i. He wants to save himself
        - ii. He wants no grace

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

- h. The son returns (v. 20)
  - i. The father runs to meet the son
    - 1. Considered shameful
      - a. It is undignified for a middle eastern man to run
      - b. The father humbles himself out of compassion and love for his son
    - 2. A deliberate act by the father on many fronts
      - a. He loves the son and wants to restore him
      - b. He also knows he needs to protect his son from the wrath of the village
      - c. Instead of subjecting the son to all of this, the father takes it on his behalf. Much like Christ has done for us:
        - i. Isaiah 53:2-6
      - d. The father's actions are also a picture of total restoration
        - i. The father is seen as searching for the son just as the shepherd searched for the lost sheep or the woman for her lost coin
        - ii. Just as Jesus said to Zaccheus in Luke 19:10
  - ii. The father feels compassion and kisses him
    - 1. The Greek word means to kiss again and again
    - 2. In this culture, a quarrel is always resolved by a kiss between the men involved
    - 3. A kiss by the father is a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness
  - iii. The son seeks to repent and delivers his speech of repentance
    - 1. The son does not finish his prepared confession (v. 21)
      - a. He is overwhelmed by the father's demonstration of love and grace
      - b. The son realizes that it is not so much about the lost money, it is about the broken relationship to the father that he cannot fix
      - c. Any future relationship must be a gift from the father
    - 2. This public reconciliation shows everyone that he is restored as a son
  - iv. A celebration ensues
    - 1. The father instructs his slaves to dress the son like a king
      - a. The instruction to clothe the son ensures proper respect towards him
        - i. Surely the servants were waiting for a sign from the father on how to treat the son
    - 2. Significance of the robe, ring, sandals, and fatted calf
      - a. Robe
        - i. Most likely the father's robe
        - ii. Shows reconciliation to the community

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

- iii. **Isaiah 61:10**, “I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,  
My soul will exult in my God;  
**For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,  
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.**  
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”
- b. Ring
  - i. Most likely a signet ring
  - ii. It symbolizes that the son should be trusted
- c. Sandals – Freedom
  - i. A symbol of a freeman within the house
  - ii. The servants putting on the sandals is a sign that they accept him completely as their master
- d. The Fatted Calf
  - i. The calf means that the entire community is welcomed to celebrate
  - ii. The killing of the calf also symbolizes a new covenant between the father and son
    - 1. Hosts could most honor their guests by killing an animal and creating a blood covenant that makes them one.
      - a. The killing of the calf means there is now a renewed covenant-love between the father and his son
- i. The older son enters the story again (v. 25)
  - i. The older son approaches the house and hears music and singing
    - 1. It is a loud, boisterous, and joyous celebration
      - a. People come, sing, dance, drink wine, talk, eat, go out, come back again and repeat...
  - ii. It is apparent the relationship with his father is still not repaired
    - 1. Normally, a son would enter into the celebration eager to rejoice with his father and brother
    - 2. He doesn't rush into the party, he summons one of the young boys who were playing outside the party (v. 26)
    - 3. The older son assesses the situation and decides not to enter the house
      - a. Custom requires his presence
      - b. Custom states that he has some responsibilities during the celebration
        - i. He should be functioning as a type of host making sure the guests are having a good time
      - c. Entering the house would signify that the older son is honoring the younger son

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

- iii. He is angered at the father for welcoming back the younger son
  - 1. The actions of the older son show the severity of the rift between him and the father
    - a. It is just as severe as the rift was between the younger son and the father
    - b. The expected reaction of the father is to match the public insolence of the older son
  - 2. Instead, the father comes out to the son
    - a. He once again humbles himself just like he did with the younger one
  - 3. The older son's response is not like his younger brother's
    - a. Look at what his response is and what it implies (v. 29-30)
      - i. The father is addressed with no title – no respect
      - ii. The older son demonstrates the attitude of a slave and not a son – “For many years I have been serving you...”
      - iii. He insulted his father publicly but states that he has never disobeyed him
      - iv. He accuses his father of favoritism
      - v. He demonstrates that he is not a part of the family by attacking his brother
- iv. The father would be expected to be furious with the older son - unconditional love
  - 1. Instead he pours out unconditional love on the boy (v. 31-32)
    - a. He could've ordered the son inside to begin serving guests but would he gain? At best, obedience...
    - b. He already has a servant in this boy, but he wants a son
      - i. The father starts by addressing his son by his title
        - 1. Tekvov (pronounced tech-non)
          - a. Means “Child” in the basic sense but it is a term of endearment
            - i. More like “my son or my child”
    - ii. The father's reply has 4 main points
      - 1. He appeals to rejoice in his brother's return
      - 2. He assures the older son that his rights are fully protected even though he has given grace to the younger son
      - 3. He points out to the older son that being a servant is not appropriate for their relationship
      - 4. The father's entreaty is not an apology nor a rebuke but an appeal to have a heart of compassion and grace

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

## VI. CONCLUSION

- a. What does this parable teach us?
  - i. First it is not just a commentary on the Pharisees whom Jesus was speaking to
  - ii. It shows us how broken our relationship is between God and us before we repent
  - iii. This parable also speaks to the concept of being found by God
    1. In the parable, the father goes out and finds both sons
      - a. One understands and accepts the implications of being found
        - i. His plan to repent by working to restore the lost inheritance is done away with by the father's unmerited favor
      - b. One does not understand and remains lost
        - i. Something must happen if we are to be saved from the wrath of God and be restored to Him
  - iv. This parable also provides the opportunity to compare between the characters in this story and God and mankind:
  - v. The Father – symbolizes God
    - a. He let the younger son leave his home and protection
    - b. The father humbled himself and ran to meet his returning younger son
  - vi. The Two Sons – Mankind
    1. Commentaries contrast the two brothers as – “Honorable Sinner vs. Hypocritical Saint”
    2. Younger Brother
      - a. Estranged and rebellious while absent
      - b. Evident as he gave in to his wants and left his father's house
      - c. Ultimately repents
    3. Older Brother
      - a. Estranged and rebellious while still in the house
      - b. Evident in his anger and refusal to enter the house
      - c. Continued in his rebellion
    4. The parable describes two types of men and it is an excellent commentary on man's status before God:
      - a. One is lawless without the law – the younger son
      - b. One is lawless within the law – the older son
      - c. Again, both are rebels
      - d. Both end up far away
        - i. One physically
        - ii. One spiritually
        - iii. We as sinners seek to be far from God
          1. Isaiah 29:13a
      - e. We see man described in God's word this way:
        1. Romans 2:5-11
      - f. Sinners are hard hearted towards God and others
        1. Ephesians 4:17-19



# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

5. Commentary on the Older Son
  - a. As the story closes we only see that he was still unrepentant
  - b. I believe the “curtain” falls on this parable in this way for two reasons:
    - i. First, Christ was calling out the Pharisees and Scribes for being like the older son
    - ii. Second, I believe the parable ends this way for all of us to read and examine ourselves to see if we are like the older brother
    - iii. For those here today who have not repented, you sit here today facing the same issues I’ve just spoken about:
      1. Estranged from the Father
      2. You may be thinking you are owed something by the Father
      3. We can only be reconciled to the Father through his grace and forgiveness not our efforts:
        - a. **Ephesians 2:1-9**, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup> Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

4. There is nothing that we can do ourselves to reconcile ourselves to Him
5. For we are not on our schedule but on God's
  - a. 1 Peter 1:24-25
  - b. Psalm 144:3-4
  - c. Our time here on earth is but only a moment and it is a fleeting moment
6. Repent and be reconciled to God
  - i. For we have no hope apart from Him
  - ii. And his wonderful blessings await you as you repent and see your need of Him
  - iii. John 3:16-17
7. Conclude with Titus 3:1-7
  - i. "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, <sup>2</sup>to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. <sup>3</sup>For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup>He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

VII. Let's Pray

# Missio Dei Fellowship

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ*

## **Community Group Questions**

- What parts of the sermon were new to you?
  - How did understanding those things benefit you?
- What aspects of the father in the story helped you to understand God better?
- How could you use this parable to share the gospel with the lost?