

The Prodigal Son, part 1 - The Wandering Brother
Coming Home to God
Luke 15:11-32 (11-21)

- I. The Parable of the Prodigal Son may be one (if not the most) famous of Jesus' parables.
 - a. When I've asked people to name their "favorite parable," this one ranks right up there with the Good Samaritan and The Parable of the Sower.
 - b. When we think of this Parable we think of a story about a son who wanders far from home and far from his family only to recognize the error of his ways and come home where he is welcomed by his father.
 - c. That's why we call it the prodigal son.
 - i. The word "prodigal" isn't mentioned in the story.
 - ii. But my bible sets this section apart as "The Prodigal Son," others call it the lost son.
 - d. I looked up prodigal in the dictionary and you know what I found – several definitions of the word "prodigal."
 - i. "To drive forth or push away."
 - ii. "Extremely generous; extravagant."
 - iii. "Exceedingly wasteful."
 - e. What's missing?
 - i. Have you thought of prodigal as a word to describe someone who has wandered off and then returned?
 - ii. Me, too. But the word means something else entirely.
 - iii. And in the case of the "prodigal son," the one who is reckless and exceedingly wasteful, one of those three definitions seems most appropriate.
 - f. He is the *prodigal* son because he is exceedingly wasteful with his inheritance from his father.
- II. The younger son (our prodigal) could be anyone of us. That's the power of Jesus' parables and stories.
 - a. "They're just stories."
 - b. But they're more than that – they sneak up on us and get under our skin and expose us to God's truth in ways that make us uncomfortable.
 - i. People who heard Jesus' parables often left with more questions than answers.
 - ii. More than anything, Jesus' used these stories to shake people up and knock them around a bit.
 - iii. He used them to rock the boat.
 - c. What is Jesus saying to you?
 - i. What is he "shaking up?"
 - ii. What boat is he rockin'?
- III. God gives you incredible freedom.
 - a. The father gave the younger son incredible freedom.
 - i. He gave him his inheritance (1/3 of the estate) before he died.
 - ii. He relinquished control over his house and watched as his son left to squander everything he had been given.
 - iii. Verse 13: "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."
 - b. The son wants a life free from the restraint and demands of his father.
 - i. That's why he heads to a far country.

- ii. He knows what he's about to do is contrary to his father's wishes, his father's training, and his father's faith.
 - iii. He recognizes this in verse 18-19 when he says, "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."
 - c. God loves you so much that you have been given incredible freedom.
 - i. God will even give you the freedom to blow it.
 - ii. God wants the best for you, but God will also allow you to choose something that is far less than the best.
 - 1. God could have stopped you – before that affair, before that first hit, before that habit got a stranglehold.
 - 2. But like any parent with a wayward child, there comes a time when the child has to make his/her own choices – and live with the consequences.
 - iii. In Deuteronomy (30:19) God says, "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."
 - 1. God wants you to choose life, but the other options remain open.
 - 2. The choice, as they say, is up to you.
 - d. We want a life free from the restraint and demands of God.
 - i. That life leads to disaster, the end of the road.
 - 1. To the bottom of a pig sty.
 - 2. Despite our best efforts and all our knowledge, what goes up – comes down. And it usually comes down a lot faster.
 - ii. If we think that our story will end any differently than the younger son's – we're kidding ourselves.
 - 1. Without God's guidance, without God's help – we're lost.
 - 2. Without a greater purpose (that comes from God) – we're headed for trouble.
 - 3. A life without God is the most reckless and wasteful life you can live.
 - e. Have you dead-ended?
 - i. Or can you see that dead-end approaching from the distance?
 - ii. Or have you covered up the wreckage so well that you don't even notice you're standing in the middle of a mess?
 - f. APP:
 - i. The first step to coming home is to admit to the wreck.
 - ii. Inside of most of us, is a faint longing that things are not as they should be.
 - 1. That there is more to this life than we have discovered so far.
 - 2. But we've bought into the lie that "this is as good as it gets."
 - iii. That faraway longing is our heart screaming out for all that God wants for us.
 - 1. But we still cling to the misguided hope that our plans are better than God's intentions.
 - 2. That the flotsam and jetsam of our lives is our true home.
- IV. It's never too late for you to come home to God.
- a. This is Good News.
 - i. No matter how far we wander off – we can still come home.
 - 1. What we've done doesn't matter.
 - 2. Nothing we do can separate us from God's love for us.
 - 3. Romans 8:35 says, "What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble our hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"

4. The answer, in verse 37, is NO.
 - ii. No matter how long we wander off – we can still come home.
 1. No matter where we go, we can't escape from God's presence.
 2. Psalm 139:7-10 – "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."
 - b. Even a lifetime of running in the other direction from God doesn't put you beyond God's reach.
 - i. You can't teach an old dog new tricks but even old prodigals can come home.
 - ii. God's house is always open.
 - c. APP:
 - i. The next step to coming home is to leaving the wreckage behind.
 1. It's one thing to recognize that you're living in the middle of a train wreck.
 2. It's another to climb down off the tracks.
 - ii. The best time to come home is today.
 1. God, like the father in this story, is *impatiently* waiting for you.
 2. And when you come, you get welcomed home: no condemnation, no lectures, no accusatory glances, and no wagging fingers.
 3. Just a loving welcome home.
 - iii. Is it really that wonderful in the pig sty feeding the hogs – or are you ready to come home?
- V. Don't waste your God-given inheritance.
- a. Faithfulness is under-rated.
 - i. There are some things you don't need to experience to know that they'll do you harm.
 1. There are some things that you know are too valuable to let go of.
 2. Faithfulness – stay away from the harmful things and holding on to the valuable things.
 - ii. The true success stories of the faith:
 1. Are not the dramatic conversions late in life,
 2. But the lives lived in faithfulness over a lifetime.
 - iii. That's why I think confirmation Sunday is such an important day.
 1. My prayer is that today is just one milestone of many in 13 lives that are faithful over a lifetime.
 2. My hope is that you never wander off – and never have to find your way home again.
 - iv. But even if you do (wander off) – coming home means that your God-given inheritance is put to its God-given purpose.
 - b. APP:
 - i. The best way to come home is to never leave.
 - ii. You won't miss *anything*!
 - iii. Psalm 37:4-5 – "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this."
- VI. Come home
- a. If you've exercised your freedom and today finds you far from God – come home.
 - b. If you've wandered far and wide and God feels out of reach; it's not too late – come home.
 - c. And once you get home, don't leave.