

Puzzling Parables

The Lost Son

May 14, 2017

Welcome to where we guard ourselves against the temptation of rebellion.



How far down that road have you traveled?

We're having dinner with Jesus, His apprentice Matthew, and rascals and wrongdoers; wherein, **Dr. Jesus offers hope to self-aware sinners, and a dim prognosis to self-righteous down-lookers.**



And, Jesus is a *genius* at working a room! Think of the range of attendees: men *and* women, young *and* old, Jew *and* Gentile, *reviled and* revered. Yet, He greatly affects *every heart*.



In His parable of "The Pharisee and the Taxman", He exposes religious insincerity, and sides with the taxmen, even while unmasking their own deep-seated sin with the taxman's intense confession. Then, **He further lowers every wrongdoer's defenses** by depicting them as lost like a man's misdirected sheep; or a woman's misplaced coin; **both are sought with the utmost care and concern until found.** And, **both focus on our value in God's eyes, and defuse any resistance based on preconceived false notions of a callous, condemning, Creator.** Now, having prepared our heart, He can reveal our guilt.



Ten years ago, we took the red chair to Dignam's pig farm, in Silvana. Pigs are curious! They were up on the chair, taking the pillow, and knocking over the lamp! Look close and you'll see where we had to scrape the seat so I could sit.



VIDEO TRANSCRIPT: Disobedient animals need to be fenced in. If they're not, they'll wander away and get lost. They have no idea of the hazards and dangers that lie outside: freeways, poisons, coyotes, starvation. In their ignorance, they just see "*freedom*". When we wander away from God's boundaries and shelter, what we're really "escaping" is peace, purpose, and protection. In the parable of The Prodigal Son, Jesus reveals a Father who wants us to leave the pig pen and come into His home.



Jesus continued: "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. **[CONTINUED]**

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 men 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 men.’ 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. – Luke 15:11-24 NIV

Know what “prodigal” means? *Wasteful*. He’s the *wasteful son* who “[wasted] his wealth in wild living.” When someone gets drunk, we *still* say “wasted”. Well, *this guy got prodigaled!*

This parable is bookended with surprises for Jesus’ listeners:

1. At the end, **there’s no resistance when the Father forgives the wasteful, disrespectful, but regretful son.**
2. At the beginning, **there’s no resistance when the Father allows the defiant son his insulting, dim-witted, demand.**



It was just as offensive then as now to tell your dad he’s not dying fast enough; and, you’d like your part of his will *now!* As the younger son, he stood to inherit one-third of the estate.

And, he publically humiliates his father by liquidating his share, packing up, and getting away as soon and as far as possible.



... [he] got together all he had, [and] set off for a distant country ... – Luke 15:13b NIV

There’s something alluring and exciting about the distant country, only because it’s a *distant lesson* we’ve yet to learn.

This kid is allowed to squander his Dad’s will. And, **it’s a picture of *our Father’s* profound commitment to *our free-will*.**

He allows us the room to rebel and return, because, He wants us to willingly want His will; and, natural consequences have a way of making that happen. **Parents, be careful not to short-circuit the job of natural consequences by rescuing your kids too much, too soon, or too often.**

Convictions only come from experience. So, dad gives junior what he *thinks* he wants, in hope that the consequences of his choice will drive him to desire what’s *best*.



Sometimes we're determined to learn through pain.

After we learn and heal and grow, **the scars remain as a reminder of our lesson.** But for now, this kid's got his share of dad's will, *and freewill*, and he's cruisin' the distant strip on a pimped out Camelac!



He knows he's cool, with a trendy Mohawk and stylish designs shaved into his hair. *I'm still talking about the camel!*

Sin is a shortcut to delight that leads directly to despair.



He gets all the lasting pain, that he didn't see coming; and, only the quickly passing pleasure, that costs him everything.

[He] squandered his wealth in wild living. [And, I'm pretty sure he ended up living in a caravan down by the wadi, *because*] There was a severe famine in that whole country ... – Luke 15:13-14 NIV



Party's over! And junior's eatin' piggy-pods. **Jesus refers to carob pods;** the same carob used as a "natural" chocolate alternative. You can buy Carob Kibble (chopped piggy pods) on Amazon. **Here's a carob tree in Israel.** They grow 500 years, and are drought resistant and salt resistant, and are still used for animal fodder.



Know where *this one* is growing? Capernaum.



Just the night before the banquet, Jesus took about 84 disciples across the pond, (Mt 8:18-9:13) where He drove demons into 2,000 pigs, in the foreign land of the Gentile pig tenders. Nearby is a village called *Kfar Haruv*, or *Carob Village*. Know why? All the Carob trees.



And, when they'd returned that morning, think how many people must have heard about their adventure the night before. **By this evening's banquet, all of Capernaum was imagining demonic pigs and terrified tenders, under the carob trees of that foreign shore!**

Jesus capitalizes on all this emotion-charged imagery, saying ...



So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. – Luke 15:15 NIV



This is the lowest humiliation a Jew could suffer. Or, maybe the *second lowest*; because, Jesus saves the best/worst detail for last: *the reason* junior took the job in the first place. *You see ...*

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. – Luke 15:16 NIV



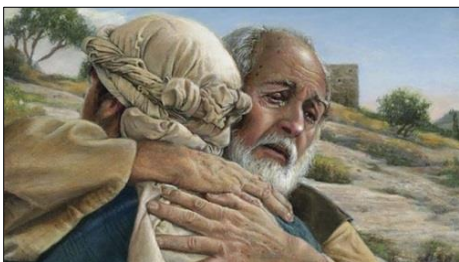
He had begged for pig slop, but was deemed unworthy. So, he got a job where he could *steal* the slop from the swine! Sin always takes you further than you want to go, costs you more than you want to pay, and keeps you longer than you want to stay. And, *this* is where a *typical* moral tale would end. What a wonderfully, appropriately, awful end to this immoral young Jew! But, *this is Jesus*, so ...

When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!” – Luke 15:17 NIV

The bad news is: you don’t have to be in a distant country to be disconnected from God.

The good news is: you don’t have to wait till you’re in a “pigpen” to come to your senses!

“I will set out [he finally desires to leave the pigpen] and go back to my father [he wants to turn from rebellion and return to dad] and say to him: [He’s going to man-up and confess] Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. [True assessment of his guilt, with **no excuses**] I am no longer worthy to be called your son; [Humble expression of his shame, with **no blaming**] make me like one of your hired men.” [Hmm. He’s going to make his dad a deal] So he got up and went to his father. [And, the tale would *certainly* have ended here ... *if anyone else was telling it*] But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him [How? He’s obviously been waiting, watching, and anticipating this possibility] and was filled with compassion for him; [he *understands*] he ran to his son, [which requires a highly undignified hiking up of his robe and baring his legs] threw his arms around him and kissed him. [The Greek verb indicates a smothering of kisses. **Notice how dad does this before junior says a word**] The son said to him, [Here comes his confession of guilt] “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. [Here comes his confession of shame] I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” [And, here comes his deal] But the father said to his servants, “Quick! [Whoa. **Dad cuts off the kid’s speech. Why? Because, there’s no place in Jesus’ story for earning forgiveness; we’re restored by the same grace that lets us rebel**] Bring the best robe and put it on him. [Who owns the best robes in the family? *The father!* And who smells like piggy poo? *Junior!* But, dad enthusiastically covers junior’s stinking filth with *the best of his best robes*] Put a ring on his finger [He had to pawn the family ring; so, he’s given a replacement to affirm his reinstatement] and sandals on his feet. [Sons wear sandals; servants don’t. Not only did he *not* get to make his deal, we can see how foolish and offensive it would’ve been] 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; [Even what we think of as life, here in the distant land, is nothing compared to what’s waiting back home with Dad; **because**] he was lost and is found.” – Luke 15:18-24 NIV



And, *that’s* what true repentance looks like: honest self-analysis, full confession of guilt and shame, unearned restoration, and *celebration!*

Which stage are *you at* on that journey: the squandering, suffering, or *celebrating*? And, how far down that road are you planning on going before making amends with Dad?