Journey with Jesus to the Cross in Lent Part 4: How the Lost are Found in Christ!

Luke 15:11-32

**Introduction**

Today as we begin our fourth Sunday in preparation for holy week we are journeying with Jesus on His way to the cross. So far, we have journeyed with Him through his wilderness temptations, the calling of the first disciples, His teaching regarding tragedies and the fragility of life and today we will study His teaching regarding those who were once lost but have found new life in Him. The passage we are studying is Luke 15:11-32 which is the account of His parable known as the Prodigal Son. This well-known parable has been discussed and studied very often. It shows us that even though someone may become misguided and fall away from the faith, they can still be restored through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Not only do we learn about the restoration of the lost, but there is valuable teaching regarding self-righteousness and the danger of looking down upon others who have a troubled past. This parable will remind us of how God works in the lives of His people to show His grace, mercy and love even to those who do not deserve it.

 Let us begin by setting the stage of this parable. In Luke chapter 15 Jesus is speaking with a crowd that included tax collectors and sinners. The problem with this was that the pharisees and the scribes who were also present had a problem with Jesus hanging out with these kinds of people. The attitude of the pharisees back then which is still see common today, was that if a person who taught righteousness wanted to be respected by the people, then that person needed to be very careful what kind of crowds they attracted. For example, you would not find the pharisees or the teachers of the law meeting with tax collectors, prostitutes or other questionable figures. They were very concerned about appearances, so they would never want to be seen with those types of people. Jesus was being criticized for this, so He responds by sharing a story about a lost lamb and then another about a poor woman who lost a coin. He then begins to share the parable of the Prodigal Son, which we will be studying today.

**1. The Younger Son Requests His Inheritance (v. 12)**

 As the account begins, we have a family that includes a father and two sons. The younger son decides that he does not want to wait until his father dies to receive his portion of the estate, so he asks his father to give him his half immediately. In the culture of that time this was not a common practice and could be looked upon as being disrespectful to both his father as well as the legacy of the family. The father does agree to do so, therefore the son gets his part of the estate and then decides to leave home.

 What this demonstrates is the desire that humanity has to be independent and want to do things on their own, in essence wanting to be their own God. This younger son takes what the father had blessed him with and then without any regard to his father or the rest of the family decides to run away and do things on his own. When he leaves home, he is no longer concerned about doing things for the good of the family, now he wants to do whatever feels good to him or matches his desire for comfort and pleasure. This is an attitude that mankind should understand very well because all of us, if we were given the choice, would want to do what is aligned with our own selfish desires rather than do what is best for others. This is the natural tendency for unrepentant unregenerate sinners who do not acknowledge God. The Apostle Paul says this in Romans chapter 1 when he recounts that when people forgot about God and refused to praise Him for His creation, they began living in ways that were opposed to Him (Rom. 1:21). Rather than looking up, man began to look inside instead.

**2. The Son Journey’s to a Far Away Land (v. 13)**

 In verse 13 Jesus says that this younger son goes to a distant land and spends all of the money he had on wild living. In doing this the son went far away from home so that he could pursue his fleshly desires and also so that he could do this far away from the presence of his family. He had the desire to separate himself from the family and blaze his own train in life. This is another desire that mankind deals with today. There is a desire to pursue the pleasures of this life that will bring us comfort, but eventually those comforts will also lead to emptiness. The teacher of wisdom in **Ecclesiastes** wrote that chasing after the pleasures of this world will do nothing but result in emptiness. **“10 All that my eyes desired, I did not refuse them. I did not restrain my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor; and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 So I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold, all was futility and striving after wind, and there was no benefit under the sun” (2:10-11).** What we will find is that this younger son will also find this result as well.

**3. The Younger Son is in a Desperate Situation (vv. 14-16)**

 After spending all of the money the son found himself desperately in need of food, so he took a job feeding the pigs for a farmer. The situation he is in is so desperate that the feed he was giving the pigs starting looking attractive to him. He also found himself in a position where no one was willing to help him out at all. This is the emptiness and destruction that the pursuit of self-centered desires always leads to. What the son thought was that he could leave him, find a better place to live that would fulfill every desire and that he would not have any worries. Instead, he finds himself broke, homeless and starving. In other words, this young man has hit rock bottom. It is as times like these when even the most stubborn finally begins to see the error of his ways and starts to understand what they did that was wrong. Similar to Jonah in the big fish, this man has had his attention caught by God and is now going to reconsider his thinking.

**4. The Son Returns Home (vv. 17-20)**

 He realizes that he needs to return home since he has no more money, food or lodging. He also realizes that even a servant in his father’s home has a better life than he has right now. In verse 18 this is where the son rehearses in his mind the words he will say to his father when he returns. This is the time that the son is repenting for the sin that he had committed against his father. Now, what sin did the son commit? Well, he asked for his part of the state early and then dishonored the family by living in such a wild manner. He assumes that his father would be disappointed in his actions and would most-likely be angry with what he did. Returning home would not be an easy thing to do, but he thought that if he showed remorse for his actions that his father would welcome him back as at least a servant.

 This is a situation that so many of us in our lives have faced. Think of a time in your life when you made a horrible decision that caused you to do something that made others in your life angry with you. Maybe you said something hurtful, misjudged someone, maybe you betrayed someone or did something that caused them to no longer trust you. No matter what it is, those times in our lives are difficult to return from. The younger son comes home not expecting a very warm welcome and prepares himself for the worst. However, Jesus tells His listeners that rather than being angry at the son, the father had compassion and welcomed him with open arms. What we see here is that God the Father is a loving God who welcomes back those who may have lost their way. When someone has sinned and violated His law, God does require the person to face consequences for that sin, but also allows them to be restored after they confess and repent of that sin. One such example was when King David repented of his sin with Bathsheba. In Psalm 51 verse 7 David prayed that God would forgive him of that sin and make him whiter than snow. David prayed for forgiveness knowing that God would forgive that sin. Even though God did forgive him, David still had to deal with the earthly consequences of that sin. The life of the baby was taken away and David’s children caused turmoil in his life. Our God is a God of wrath and justice, but when we trust Christ as our Savior, He remembers our sin no more and sees Christ in our place. Confession and repentance are fruits of a heart that has been made a new creation in Christ.

**5. The Father Welcomes Him Back (vv. 21-24)**

 After the father welcomes the son home, the son confesses his sin against the father. This confession shows humility to the extent that the son says he is no longer worthy of being called a son. The reaction of the father in verse 22 is rather surprising, at least to the son. Rather than reacting with indignation or judgment, the father orders that the son be clothed in the best robe he has and that he be adorned with a ring and nice sandals. Not only is he dressed like an honored guest, but the father commands that a feast be given in his honor. What an amazing showing of forgiveness and grace from the father who had been wronged by the son. Was this son, who had done evil in the sight of his father worthy of such grace and forgiveness? No, but this is the way that God operates. He has given each one of us grace and forgiveness for the sins we have committed not because we are worthy of it, but because He is a loving and gracious God. As the Apostle Paul writes in his letter the Romans that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (3:23). This reminds us that all people have a reason to be grateful to God for extending them grace and mercy. This son is experiencing the love of a father who did not forgive him because he was worthy of it, he forgave him because he chose to be merciful. This should remind us that holy God does not have to forgive His fallen creatures, but because He is loving and merciful, He chooses to extend grace to all who trust in Christ.

 The feast that is held is also a representation of what happens when someone who is lost has been found. Jesus says, **“I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance” (Luke 15:7).** The father is so happy that his son has returned that he throws a huge party in celebration. The same happens in heaven when a sinner repents and is saved!

**6. The Older Brother Does Not Approve! (vv. 25-30)**

 When the older brother sees what is going on and is told, he is not happy that the brother is back. He responds with righteous indignation and is very upset that such mercy is being shown to someone who had defied his father like that. This older brother represents those who are not happy when a sinner repents and is welcomed back into the arms of God. They would rather spend their time focusing on all the wrong the person had done and not focus on their restoration. Why is this such a prevalent attitude, especially in the world today? When someone has been caught doing something evil the reaction by others is a strong judgment because they want to make certain the perpetrator is punished for their wrongdoings. This was the attitude of the religious leaders in the day of Jesus. They were so infatuated with following the Law of Moses that they had neglected the heart of the law which is mercy. The reason why this attitude is so common today is because there is a misguided notion by many that they are good people who are not in need of forgiveness. We addressed this question last week and concluded that no one outside the blood of Christ is good in the sight of God. So, this older brother is missing the entire point of the situation, therefore his father comes out to speak with him to explain.

 The father’s response to the older son’s objection is the point of this story and why we are discussing this today. He reassures the older son that he will still inherit all that is coming to him and that he is still the rightful heir of the estate, however, the younger son was lost but has been found so there is a reason to celebrate. When someone who has sinned comes back to the family of God and is seeking forgiveness, we need to make certain that we have the attitude of the father who welcomed back this son without hesitation. We need to do so because all of us are sinners who have been saved by the blood of Christ. Rather than be upset that God allows mercy to a sinner, we need to be grateful that the brother or sister has been restored to fellowship with God and that they are co heirs to the kingdom with us. God shows His mercy and power when He forgives a sinner who is not worthy. We should celebrate such a wonderful occasion and continually thank God that He has showed us love and grace through the sacrifice of His Son.

**7. Time to Celebrate! (vv. 31-32)**

 As we approach the end of the parable the father invites the older to celebrate with the return of the younger brother and him being found. This is the call for God’s people to celebrate when someone comes to faith in Christ and becomes a new creation in Him. In verse 32 the father says that the other son has been dead but is now alive again and that he had been lost but now is found. When someone is lost in their sin and trying to find their way, they do not have any hope because they only have their own goodness to save them. We already know that our own goodness cannot save us, so it is through the power of Christ that we are saved. Where does this leave us as we conclude today? What we need to remember when we share our faith with others is that we worship a God who is willing to extend His grace to others no matter how far away they may have drifted away from Him. We are not to allow the background of a person or the evil things they may have in their lives to sway us from sharing the good news with them. Paul the Apostle who began his life as a pharisee and persecutor of the church is just one example of hos God can take someone who is lost and use them for His glory. If we refuse to share the gospel with someone because of their troubled past we are missing an opportunity t change that person’s life and lead them to salvation. God can work miracles through His people if they are willing to be used for that purpose.

**Conclusion**

 As we conclude this morning let us reflect on what we have discussed today. In the three characters of today’s Scripture, we find the younger son representing those who have become lost and are in need to be restored with God. We have a loving father (God) who shows us grace and mercy available to those who confess and repent of sin. We also have the older brother who was not happy with the restoration of the brother but was angry because he felt he was superior in worth to that other brother. We need to decide today whether we will be that angry older brother or the forgiving father to this lost son. When we can share the gospel with someone lost in sin will we share it or waste our time judging that person for their sin. We cannot forget that God has saved us even when we were not worthy of that salvation. During this season of lent may we focus on what Christ has done for us and then take that joy and work to see this same salvation happen in others. May we celebrate with those who come to know the Lord and joyfully welcome them into the kingdom. The death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection give all those who trust in Him new life. As we leave today, we need to boldly proclaim that good news to all. Amen.