

Love Outdoing Sin.

Text: Luke 15:11-32

Suggested Hymns:

315, 391, 170, 320, 333

- 1) Why Was The Parable Told
- 2) The Younger Brother
- 3) The Older Brother
- 4) Love Outdoes Sin

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 15:11-32, ¹¹ *Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. ¹² 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.*

¹³ *And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*

¹⁷ *“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! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” ’*

²⁰ *“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. ²¹ 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.’*

²² *“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. ²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.*

²⁵ *“Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.*

²⁷ *And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ ²⁸ “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.*

²⁹ *So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’*

³¹ *“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’” (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today’s text follows on from the Gospel Lesson.¹ We heard of the lost sheep, the lost coin and now the lost son. The lesson to be learned is that *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*²

No greater short parable has ever been written than the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is so true to life with its heartaches, mistakes, and frustrations. Again it is so comforting with its Gospel of forgiveness, assuring people who have sinned terribly that there is a road back to God.

The world is full of people who have made a mess of life, gotten themselves into heaps of trouble through their own fault and wilfulness, and hurt others beyond repair.

Can such people start life over again? Can they once more be useful to society and helpful to others who have lost the way? Yes, says Jesus. He, and

He alone, holds out hope, reaching down into their shadows and says, *I will make you anew.*

However, the parable also sounds a warning to those people who refuse to forgive and close the door to God through their pride and their ‘better-than-you’ attitude.

People who are members in good standing in a church, dutiful, conscientious, and dedicated to service must search their own hearts to see whether they are walking in the footsteps of the older brother by refusing to relent and extend to offenders the mercy of God in Christ.

We too must be forgiving toward those who have sinned and come back broken in spirit, conscious of their faults, ashamed to face a decent and respectable world. By our loveless and unsympathetic behaviour we can close the door of salvation upon ourselves.

Let us consider the parable of the *Prodigal Son*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Why Was The Parable Told

What prompted Jesus to tell the parable? A number of tax collectors and sinners had come to hear Jesus, the Prophet of Galilee. Jesus spoke to them with understanding and sympathy, trying to get across to them that He came also to help those people who had made many terrible mistakes in life and were shunned by society.

It irked the so-called better class of the community that Jesus spoke kindly to these sinners. The smooth talkers and self-satisfied did not want that kind of people around while they listened to Jesus and His message. Contemptuously the Pharisees and scribes complained “*This Man receives sinners and eats with them.*”³ This arrogance prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the Prodigal Son and his elder brother. It is really the parable of the Two Lost Sons.

2. The Younger Brother

In this parable sin did its worst to the younger brother. Sin made him a thankless lad, a lout, a mischievous child, or whatever you want to call him. He was unappreciative of his home, resentful of all discipline and restraint. He flouted the decency and respectability demanded of him. He wanted to do as he

pleased without anyone even raising his eyebrows or challenging his conduct. He insisted that he was a law unto himself. No one was to tell him what to do, not even his parents. So he ran away.

Sin led him into the jungles of unrestrained living. Nothing that he did was questioned by his associates. Women, wine and revelry were his daily fare. All the noble traits he had been trained to cultivate went out the window. He became an outcast, unwanted everywhere, and shunned when he was broke.

Sin had done its worst. This was quite evident. He was a physical derelict, shabby and disorderly, a haircut and shave long overdue. He finds himself friendless, lonely, and hungry. Penniless he begs for a bite to eat of those with whom he had squandered his money. Even that he did not get. As a last resort he begged to be allowed to herd swine that he might eat at least the husks that the herd was feeding upon.

This parable is enacted over and over to this very hour. Men and women “*go to the dogs*” physically, socially, and morally. Nothing about them is appealing any longer. Decent people avoid them. You and I do not want to be seen with them on the street or found talking to them.

I am sure many of us know some naughty children who as boys or girls went to school with us. They came from good families. Their parents worked hard, were honest and upright. They sacrificed to give them a better education than they themselves had received.

However, somewhere along life’s road they strayed from the way of decency and went down the road which leads to hell. They could not hold a job, staggered at nights down the street, became irresponsible and lazy. Finally they disappeared from the community, and no one knows what became of them. “*Poor John!*” you say and let it go at that.

Sin has done its worst. Our text says, *Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*

3. The Older Brother

The parable does not end here. Another son is in the household. Sin does its worst to him also. However, neither he nor the community realised what sin was doing to him. It was not apparent to man. Sin's damage was hid in the heart. This older brother was just as far from home as was the younger. He too was lost. He is found on spiritual skid row, far away from God, a spiritual outcast from the Kingdom.

This older brother did not recognise the blessings that he enjoyed day after day in the household and that they were due to his father's goodness of heart. He took everything for granted as something that the world and the home owed him. Therefore he was as far away from home in spirit as the younger son was in body.

The younger brother was peevish — so was the elder. The older brother disapproved of the father's kindness of heart in welcoming the erring son home to the family circle. He was intolerant, heartless, and ruthless. He was exacting with himself and therefore hard on those who did not toe the line. He was a perfectionist. Therefore he made no allowance for any weakness, let alone the evil-doing, of others. He had no patience with those who did not measure up to his standard.

We must admit that he had many fine traits. He worked hard. He sacrificed everything — even friendships — to forge ahead. He was thrifty and at no time found himself “broke.” He never either asked or showed any favours.

Why, then, should he give room to the brother and welcome him home. He got himself into this “mess” by running around with evil companions and throwing away his money recklessly. Let them take care of him now.

The sins of pride, greed, and selfishness had done their worst to the older brother. These sins made him loveless and unloved.

This is the problem of those people who rate high in a church and the community. They keep the outside of the ‘cup and platter’ spotlessly clean. They esteem themselves superior to the common people. Their sins are not so obvious, nor are they as openly scandalous.

But they are the sins of a loveless heart. They have no patience with those who do not keep their front yards perfectly clean and do not live up to their standards. This lovelessness violates both tables of the Law. It is a sin so

insidious that they are not aware that it is, like a cancer, destroying the very core of their Christian faith.

To the younger brother sin had done its worst outwardly, but to the older son all the damage was done inwardly. On the outside his life looked well, but the termites of Satan had eaten away his moral fibre from within.

To God, both were dead. This is the truth which Jesus wanted to convey to all people by this parable. At the same time Jesus wanted all to appreciate that He came to seek and to save all the lost, the so-called riffraff as well as the Pharisees, who faulted Him for seeking to save these outcasts of society.

Both groups were lost, both had to be saved, and only Jesus could save them from their sins, known or unknown, openly scandalous or hidden. So the parable goes on.

4. Love Outdoes Sin

In the parable the father goes all out to help the younger son, restoring him to full sonship and respectability. Love outdoes sin. Our text says, “***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.***”

The father runs to meet him. He is eager and anxious to reach him. He does not wait till the son comes to him and makes the proper apologies. The father embraces him and kisses him. There is no resentment. The joy of heart is overwhelming.

The son does not need to doubt for a moment that he is welcome, even though he is in rags and untidy in his appearance. At once the father gives directives to make him more presentable. He calls the servants and instructs them: “***Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.***”

The son will not feel embarrassed as he steps across the threshold. And the father decks the table with the best food. The boy is completely restored to grace and to his station in life. What a love! What a father!

What point does Jesus want to make? You and I have a heavenly Father who has not left a thing undone to restore us to grace. We have sinned and run away from God. But He redeemed us by the death of His Son.

Now He goes out after us and finds us. He makes us over, washing and cleansing our soul, removing and healing us from the blotches of leprous sins, through the means of grace. He clothes us in the garment of Christ's holiness and gives us the ring of sonship.

Altogether we are by faith in Christ restored to grace. He strengthens and preserves our faith with the saving Gospel that we may remain in the grace in which we stand. Here then we see love at its best.

The younger son realised that all was grace. He does not deserve such welcome. He is not worthy of this love. Yet it is his now and forever. Do we? Daily God pardons us abundantly in His grace.

However, the parable does not end here. The father's love goes out all the way to the older son likewise. The father is deeply hurt by the behaviour of this son.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

Provoked, irritated, peeved, he stomps away and refuses to go in to join the welcoming group. Therefore the father, who is told about the son's conduct, leaves the festivities, goes out to find the older son, and pleads with him to come in.

Again the father did not wait till the son came. He finds him and pleads with him. He tells him that he has been given through the years the best of clothes, which made him presentable at all times.

He reminds the elder son of the fact that every day he has enjoyed the best of food, and this, in such an abundance that there was always enough and to spare. Even now that the younger son is clothed and fed, he, the older son, is not denied a thing. He still has enough and to spare.

However, all the pleadings of the father could not break down the resentment which pride and conceit had built up. The elder brother refuses to come in. He wants nothing to do with the brother who had wasted everything in riotous living.

He could not see that grace abounded more toward him in keeping him from stumbling, straying, and “*going to the dogs.*” His pride blinded him to his own shortcomings and lovelessness.

The older brother is on the outside, not because the father’s love was less sincere, not because the father was less interested in him, but his loveless heart begrudged the younger brother even that one festive meal.

He did not want the younger brother to have even what otherwise would have been thrown away. His heartlessness, not his father’s unconcern about him, kept him on the outside.

So we come to the end of the parable, and searching our own hearts, we ask: Is pride and vanity keeping us out of the Kingdom? Are we the ‘pet dog’ in the manger in that all what we have, we have by God’s grace, and yet do not want to share it with others?

Today, God’s love is again at its best. Despite our sins and our misspent lives, God comes to us and says that He abundantly pardons. His grace includes us. Christ died for us that we too may be cleansed from all sins and be restored to grace.

If we have been loveless toward the weak and fallen and critical of God’s grace toward them, are we now fully aware of the fact that only by God’s grace we have been kept from falling and losing the way? His all-embracing love has sheltered us through the years. Let us admit this.

As God goes all the way to seek us, the straying as well as the sheltered, let us not close the door on the Lord, but rather say with Paul: “***By the grace of God I am what I am,***”⁴ saved, standing in grace, and an heir of heaven.

Then this joy of forgiveness will brighten our day, the peace of reconciliation will enrich our lives, and the hope of heaven will enable us to look forward with confidence. We can sing, wherever we are, of the forgiving love of a gracious Father and a patient Saviour, who loves us till our journey’s end and forever in heaven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 15:1-10

² Luke 15:10

³ Luke 15:2

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:10