

Coach House Church

BEACONS

RETURNED

11TH JUNE 2020

The story of the prodigal son is a story told by Jesus to make a point to the religious leaders of the time. There were also tax collectors and sinners around that were listening in. Jesus was speaking to both of them and turned the narrative of the day on its head.

Let's start by reading Luke 15:11-32

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. 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 servants 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 servants. 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.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

This story is a beautiful story of a father’s love. It is a father that never ever gave up on his child. That’s how God feels about us. He never ever gives up on us. He loves us enough to risk rejection. He loves us enough to let us go our own way if we want to because that gives us a chance to choose to love Him. Jesus tell two parts of this story for the two groups of people He is talking to. Let’s start with the first half.

In the beginning of the story we have a son who basically asked his father if he could pretend he was dead so he could have his money now. He wanted what the father could give him rather than the father himself. He wanted it overtly and he went and wasted it as soon as he had it.

Then the son found himself in a desperate position, as we all do when we give ourselves over to sin. The son then decides to go back and try to earn favour from his father. He wants to live under self-imposed law. But the father goes way beyond this. The father accepts him back as a son, as part of the family.

The father throws a party for the son, showing that he had accepted the son back fully. The father wanted his son to experience joy and forgiveness and not feel like a screw up for the rest of his life. Our heavenly father doesn't give us what we deserve or what we've earned, but He gives us grace. We don't need to feel the burden of guilt anymore, God doesn't place it on us, so let's not place it on ourselves.

This story has a great lesson for parents. The father here doesn't force the son to stay. Once he's of an age where he can decide for himself, the father lets him go. We need to help our children to make the right choices, but we can't force them to go what we think is the right way and doing that can damage our relationship with them. As hard as it is, if our children make the wrong choices, we need to let them go, but hope and wait for them to come back. Never give up hope.

So, this part of the story speaks to the tax collectors and sinners. It shows them that even though they've gone the wrong way, even though they aren't righteous, if they return, they'll be part of God's party. This would have made the other half of the audience very angry. The other half of the audience are religious leaders. They have spent their whole lives trying to be righteous and trying to please God on the outside. So the older brother part of the parable is for them.

The older brother is angry. His brother has wasted all his inheritance and spent his life sinning and yet his father throws him a party when he returns. This wasn't just a little party. Meat in that time was very expensive, so families wouldn't have eaten it with every meal. The fattened calf was the most expensive and wasn't even usually used for parties. This would have been an all-out celebration, with the whole village being invited.

So, this son shows he was also just interested in what his father could give him, rather than the father himself. He causes his father pain by making him leave the celebration for his brother, on the most joyous day of his life to try to encourage him to come back. However, the father is also tender with this son. He encourages him to come back into the party and celebrate. He invites his son that has chosen to remove himself from the family, back in. The father wants both his sons at the feast. The parable ends and is left open as to whether the brother decided to come back in or not. This was an open question to the Jewish leaders. Were they going to choose to rejoin God's family, even with their previously disobedient brothers, or were they going to walk away?

God wants all his children at His feast, and He doesn't want anyone to miss out. Jesus was telling this story because He didn't want the religious leaders to miss out. He wanted them to see that there was as much danger in religion as there is in Godlessness. We can't save ourselves. If you try to live a religious life, you try to say to God, you owe me something for all this obedience. Then you are trying to be your own saviour rather than letting Jesus be your saviour.

This was the opposite of everything the Jews had been taught and it still comes into our thinking today. We think God wants good people to be his followers and do what the rules say to become righteous. Now I am not saying that we throw out the rules but that's not what it's about. Jesus doesn't want good people, He wants new people. People that are changed in their hearts, people that are becoming new creations.

So, this parable is for everyone that's going wrong somewhere, both those that depend on their religion and themselves, and those that completely ignore God. Both are wrong and both need to repent. We need to repent of our sins but also the very reason we do anything good at all.

God, your loving father, is waiting. No matter how far or long or wrong you've gone, His radical love is for you, as long as you want it. Turn back to Him.



BEKAH BAKER



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn