

The Father's Search for the Prodigal Son

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Hey everybody, Jon Leonetti here. Pray More Novenas Retreat, Lent.

The Parable of the Lost Son

What do you say we pray? *In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.* We have the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Then He said that man had two sons and the younger son said to the father, "Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me." So, the father divided the property between them. After a few days the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he'd freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So, he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he long to eat his fill the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, "how many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here I am dying from hunger." I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers." So, he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, the father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, "father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I no longer deserve to be called your son." But his father ordered his servants, "quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast because the son of mine was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found." Then the celebration began.

Now, the older son. The older son had been out in the field and on his way back as he neared the house, he heard sound and music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked, "what this might mean?" A servant said to him, "your brother has returned, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." He became angry. When he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, "look all these years I've served you, and not once that I disobeyed your orders. But you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns, who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf?"

He said to him, "my son, you are here with me always. Everything I have is yours, but now we must celebrate and rejoice because your brother was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found." Holy Spirit guide us. Help us, be present to us. Mother Mary we ask that

you pray for us. All the angels and saints surround us in prayer. Amen. *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Looking into the Context

I cannot illustrate enough for you, just how crazy, those three stories would sound. I really can't. Again, we have to look at this in context here, and who Jesus is speaking to. The people of his day. None of this would have made sense. Jaws would have been hitting the floor.

When first of all you heard the parable of the lost sheep, right? And again, context is everything here. A shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one goes astray. Jesus says, "what are you going to do, as a shepherd?" And people are looking at Him probably like, "what do you mean, what are we going to do? We're going to stay with the 99. This is our livelihood. It was everything. It was our bank account. Why would I risk putting that in danger from the wolves to go out and get one lost sheep? Let it go." Jesus says, "I run after it." What?

Here's one for you, Jesus could have stopped there, left them all in kind of confusion but he just turns the dial up a little bit more. How about this one? A woman loses a coin. Wouldn't have been that much money and maybe a couple bucks, three bucks. Loses a coin and spends all day and night trying to find it. Continues, the next day and the next day and the next day and the next day, preoccupied. All house turned upside down for a few dollars. Then all of a sudden finds it, finds a coin, and hosts a huge party, that they found it.

Think for a second, if there was someone in your life that had lost \$3 and all of a sudden, they spent every waking hour and even into the night looking for that \$3, and then they called in work the next day and said, "I can't come in, I've lost three bucks." And the next day and the next day and the next day and the next day. Then finds \$3, finds it, calls you up and says, "hey, my house tonight, huge bash. I found the \$3." We'd look at them and think, "What? Doesn't make any sense."

And then Jesus goes all in. All in to help us understand what kind of God the Father is. And He tells a story of the prodigal son. The younger son who gives, really only deserves 33%, a third of what his father has, but he splits it up. And the younger son goes to his father and says, "hey, dad I'd rather you dead. In fact, I'm going to act as if you're dead. So, give me what it is that I would get, if you are dead, if you were dead." Father doesn't argue. Father gives it to him. And we know the story from there. Son goes out, squanders it all, on a life of dissipation the scripture says.

Now, here's the story. Here's the part of the story when maybe those that are listening to Jesus, might think this makes a little bit more sense. Because now Jesus, again, turning it up says, "a severe famine struck your son." So again, the people that are listening now are thinking, "I get it, okay." So, I say, I see where you're going. You turn your back on God, He's the father, or you turned your back on God, all of a sudden, the famine is going to strike you dead. Now you better not do that. Tow the line, right? Jesus says, "not so fast." So, the son's kind of rehearsing in his head thinking, "I'm about ready to starve to death. And my father's hired servants. They at least have something to eat. Now, best case scenario, I'm going to be one of his hired workers. Most

likely scenario, the father's going to have me killed." Would have had him stoned to death as a way to make an example out of him. But the risk of staying there is too great. Death is imminent. He's starving. So, are we, He says, "I'm going to go back." And he's rehearsing in his head, kind of that speech, right? "Father I've sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." You can think maybe like, imagine him walking back and like just kind of rehearsing that over and over again, trying to get that right. That begging. How he's going to turn to just beg his father.

Understanding the Father

Here's where the story gets interesting. The father catches sight of the son at a distance. That tells us a couple of things. One, he's looking for the son. But the father then runs to his son. Embraces him and kisses him. The father runs. First century Jew head of the household friends would have never been caught running. Running was the greatest sign of desperation. You ran to the father; the father didn't run to you. The father was never desperate for anything. Here the father shows extreme desperation, for his son. Looking out for him, day and night, waiting for him and then running towards him.

And the son tries to get the speech out. He's probably shocked. He's probably not knowing what to say. Words are getting all jumbled. "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me as you would treat..." "Stop." He orders his servants, "go, get the ring, get the sandals, get the finest robe. What does this ring symbolize? - Fidelity. The father puts the ring of fidelity on his finger. "I will be with you always." Or he's supposed to be giving that to the father, but the father swears the oath of fidelity to him. Shoes on his feet. The son rightly came back barefoot. Without anything on his feet, without sandals, he would have been showing to his father right away, "I don't come back as your son. I come back as you're hired worker."

Hired workers weren't allowed to wear sandals on their feet. But the father reestablishes that sonship with his son. The finest robe. What's the finest robe? The father's robe. The father orders a servant to go get his robe. His precious robe and drape it upon his son, who took everything. Half of what the father had and squandered it away. Finding the fattened calf, this is the biggest feast. This is the biggest feast of the year. And the father says, "today, today we're going to celebrate that feast."

The son had no idea what to think, you can imagine. Now the older son hears that, and you might be thinking to yourself, rightfully so. And this guy's mad, he's mad. And he deserves to be. Here, the father gives his son all of this. He never gave it to his older son who was there. And again, in our hearts we might be thinking, "I kind of sympathize with the older son." But here again the father shows another desperate move and a move I think that we oftentimes gloss over. The father hearing of his son's anger goes out to meet his son, and he pleads with his son. The father here pleading with the older son. Almost kind of begging his son to understand what it is, this kind of mercy that the father has for him, and his younger son who came back. His son was lost, and he's been found.

God's Mercy is Abundant

Now friends, do we rejoice in that same way? Because God's mercy friends, God's mercy is so abundant. And I quite frankly think we're going to be really surprised, someday in heaven. I really do. I don't know who's going to be there, who knows if we're going to be there. I really hope so. But God's mercy is so abundant. God desires every one of us, and not just desires to kind of see it his way but to feel that as well. To feel that desperate love for sinners.

Looking at People with a Merciful Heart

First, with ourselves but also with those around us, and to see them, to see them not in anger, to see sinners, quote unquote, again, that's everyone, but not to see others in this kind of hostility or anger, to move our hearts but to see them with the heart of the father, a heart of mercy.

Of course, it takes the younger son to turn back. God can't and God would not, run after him if he kept running away. It's a gift God desires to give us. We can reject that gift. Love can't be forced. But the moment the son turns back, there the father is. And again, not to see this in light of, kind of through the older son's eyes, as much as today's world it would be just, it just makes sense the way the older son feels. But God's mercy is abundant, so far beyond our ways. And not just for us to know again, but to live, to do our best to be able to live that. In the everyday life, in your and my everyday life. The Father's mercy, remember friends, is so great, in your and my life.

I'm John Leonetti. Will talk to you soon.