

The Prodigal Son - Luke 15_11-32

11 He also said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. 14 After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he began to be in need. 15 Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything. 17 When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. 19 I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired workers.'" 20 So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. 21 The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate. 25 Now his older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. 27 'Your brother is here,' he told him, 'and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' 28 Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 But he replied to his father, 'Look, I have been slaving for you all these years, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' 31 'Son,' he said to him, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Key Background:

- **Inheritance Laws:** According to Jewish law, the younger son would receive one-third of the estate while the older son received two-thirds. However, requesting inheritance while the father was still alive was equivalent to saying "I wish you were dead" - an incredibly shameful and disrespectful act in Middle Eastern culture.
- **Distant Country:** The younger son traveled to Gentile territory, away from Jewish law and customs. This represents complete rejection of his father's values and his Jewish heritage.
- **Feeding Pigs:** For a Jewish person, this was the ultimate degradation. Pigs were considered unclean animals, and caring for them would make him ceremonially unclean. This job represented the lowest possible position for a Jew.
- **Carob Pods:** The "pods" were likely carob pods fed to pigs - food considered unfit for humans. His desperation is shown by his desire to eat pig food.
- **Father's Response:** The father's actions were shocking by cultural standards. Middle Eastern men of status never ran, especially not toward someone who had shamed them. Running, embracing, and kissing the son before he could complete his rehearsed speech showed unprecedented grace and forgiveness.
- **The Best Robe:** In Middle Eastern culture, the finest robe was reserved for the head of household or honored guests. It represented dignity, honor, and high social status within the family.
- **The Ring:** A signet ring was used to seal documents and conduct business. Only family members with authority possessed one, giving them legal power to act on behalf of the household.
- **The Sandals:** Only free family members wore sandals - slaves and servants went barefoot. Sandals were a clear visual marker of one's position and freedom within the household.
- **Older Son's Reaction:** His refusal to join the celebration and his complaint to the father were also culturally shocking acts of disrespect. His reference to "this son of yours" (rather than "my brother") showed his rejection of family relationship.

Questions from the Story:

- **What did the younger son ask his father for (v. 12)? Knowing that his father needs to die to get his inheritance, what does his asking for it reveal about his care for his family over himself?**
- **How might we sometimes treat God like the younger son treated his father - wanting His blessings while caring little for relationship with Him?**
- **How did the father respond to his son's shocking request (v. 12)? What does this show us about the father's character and his respect for his son's choices?**
- **What did the younger son do with his inheritance (v. 13)? How does traveling to a "distant country" represent more than just physical distance?**
- **What circumstances brought the younger son to his lowest point (vv. 14-16)? How did his desperate situation force him to recognize his true condition?**
- **What realization did the younger son come to about his father's house (v. 17)? What does this show about his changing perspective on what he had left behind?**
- **What did the younger son plan to say to his father (vv. 18-19)? What does his willingness to become a hired worker reveal about his understanding of his guilt?**
- **How did the father respond when he saw his son returning (v. 20)? What does the father's running, embracing, and kissing show about his heart toward his repentant son?**
- **Was the son able to complete his prepared speech (vv. 21-22)? What does the father's immediate restoration reveal about the nature of true forgiveness?**
- **What symbols did the father use to restore his son's position (v. 22)? How do the robe, ring, and sandals represent complete acceptance back into the family?**
- **Why did the father call for a celebration with the fattened calf (vv. 23-24)? What does his declaration that his son "was dead and is alive again" teach us about spiritual death and life?**
- **How did the older son react to the celebration (vv. 25-28)? What does his anger and refusal to join reveal about his heart?**
- **What complaints did the older son make to his father (vv. 29-30)? How do his words reveal a works-based mentality and lack of grace toward his brother?**

- **How did the father respond to his older son's complaints (vv. 31-32)? What does the father's patient explanation teach us about God's heart for both the rebellious and the self-righteous?**
- **How does this parable reveal God's heart toward repentant sinners? What does it teach us about the nature of true repentance and God's forgiveness?**
- **How does the older brother's attitude mirror the Pharisees' complaint in verse 2? What warning does this give us about religious pride and lack of grace?**
- **What did the father remind the older son he already possessed (v. 31)? Had either son understood just how good it was to have the father and to be in relationship with him?**
- **In what ways might we take for granted the privilege of being God's children and miss the joy of simply being in relationship with Him? Have you become a child of God, accepting Jesus as your Saviour, enjoying the deep relationship we can have with the Father?**