

COMING HOME

Luke 15.11-32

During Advent, we have been exploring Jesus' first coming in relation to the deep human desire for belonging. The quest for an ideal home, a place to be in the end, runs deep in the human heart.

While we often refer to this parable as the prodigal son, it is better understood as the prodigal sons.

The younger son's rebellion and repentance

The younger son is enticed by the pleasures of the world (Luke 15.13, 30). Perhaps he thinks that his problems will go away when he changes his setting. He thinks indulgence is the best of all lives.

As he allows his appetites to govern his life, God uses his circumstances to bring him around to the truth. We see an example of God using suffering to bring about good (Luke 15.14).

Look at the dimensions of his repentance:

Mental: He comes to himself (Luke 15.17)

Emotional: He feels unworthy and experiences shame (Luke 15.19)

Volitional: He returns home (Luke 15.20)

Verbal: He admits he was wrong (Luke 15.21)

Even if we are not engaged in "reckless living", we can still be prodigals, avoiding our heavenly Father. We, too, are called to repent.

The older son's resentment

The second son does not have a tender heart. He hears that his lost brother has come home, and his response is anger (Luke 15.28). Why is he angry? Because he has followed all the rules and thinks he deserves the father's goods. The remaining inheritance should come to him alone.

Jesus was drawing a parallel between his audience of legalistic Pharisees and the smug older brother (Luke 15.2).

The older brother suffers from the same selfishness as the younger brother, but he disguises it by following the rules (Luke 15.29-30). Unlike the younger son, the older son behaves hypocritically.

The atheist Friedrich Nietzsche explored how resentment can be used as a powerful driver of human action. If we are not careful, resentment can make us miserable.

Do we want to see lost people saved? Do we want restored relationships with those who have hurt us?

Unlike the younger son, we do not know if the older son's relationship is restored. Does he respond to the father's grace?

The Father's grace

The father shows his prodigal sons unmerited favor. In the case of the younger son, the father runs to greet him and welcome him home (Luke 15.20). That the father runs and kisses the son (rather than the culturally accepted practice of a son kissing his father) shows his loving heart.

The father goes to great lengths to restore the younger son to his position and to express his excitement for reunion (Luke 15.22-24).

The father extends the same grace to his older son (Luke 15.31).

Key Idea: Who am I in the parable? Who do I want to be?

Am I living for pleasure, far from God? Maybe I'm avoiding God or drifting from Him.

Am I entitled, cold, and resentful?

Am I a channel of God's grace in a broken world?

Application Questions:

What does this parable teach us about the character of God?

How does the younger son show repentance for his actions? How is repentance a daily activity for the Christian?

How is the older son lost? What should he do?

How does this passage inform conflict with siblings?