

# **The Prodigals; Why We Worship**

**Luke 15:1-32**

**Call to Worship Psalm**

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This sermon is the result of a long study of the fifteenth chapter of Luke along with that of the reading of the book, "A Tale of Two Sons," by John MacArthur.

Some such as Charles Dickens have called this section of scripture, the greatest short story ever told.

John MacArthur said that he wrote his book because he felt that although most preachers use this text often, that few really understand its true meaning.

I felt that the time that I spent was well worth the reward as I grew in my appreciation of just how much God loves me and how much He is willing to reach out to those who stand against Him.

I learned that the parable has a much richer meaning that I had seen.

I learned that I had not really understood why Jesus told this parable in the first place.

And so we will try to unlock the true meaning of this section of scripture.

I believe that you too will benefit greatly from this study.

I believe that you will begin to see God's love for you in a way that should transform your lives.

Let's pray: Father, as we look into your word today and begin to look at this story that you told, open our eyes and our hearts to you. Help us to have a greater understanding of your love for us and your love for others. Help us to see our sinful ways and help us to grow so that each of us may be able to worship you and serve you in a manor that is worthy of all that you have done for us. Amen.

## **Read Luke 15:1-32**

Today we are going to try to answer the question, "Why do we worship?"

I want to start by explaining why Jesus spoke these parables in the first place.

We find the answer to that question in John 1:11

"Jesus came to His own but His own did not receive Him."

If you remember when Jesus was a child, he hung out with the religious leaders.

He asked them questions and tried to learn from them.

He gave them great honor and respect.

But now we find that they had turned against Him.

They were trying to trick Jesus and to find fault with Him.

Why had they turned against Jesus?

The Pharisees were upset with Jesus because of His relationship with sinners.

They said, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

At that time, you were judged by the company that you kept.

And, eating with someone was thought to be the same as joining yourself with them and with what they stood for.

The tax collectors were Jews who had traded their allegiance to make money.

They collected taxes from their own people, for the Roman enemy.

They were considered to be the worst of the worst.

They would cheat their own families for the love of money.

The others called, "sinners," were mostly the outcast of their society.

They may have been Samaritans which were half Jews.  
People who had intermarried.  
There were also the sinful women.  
These women were polluting the nation.  
Their sin was thought to have stopped God from blessing His people.  
These religious Jews were asking the same question that many in America are asking,  
Is God going to judge our nation because of these sinners?  
The Pharisees hated Jesus because of His relationship with these people.  
Jesus, as they saw Him, was a prodigal.  
Prodigal meaning, one who is wasteful.  
Jesus was wasting His time and reputation with those who did not deserve it.  
Jesus was reckless in His actions and in no way was being prudent.  
Jesus was giving Himself to people who showed no sign of loving God.  
People who were the enemies of the Jews and of God Himself.  
And enemies of all that was deemed to be good.

And so, this section of scripture is meant to try to reason with these Pharisees.  
Jesus starts out with two short parables; one about a lost sheep and one about a lost coin.  
But, then He talks about something far more important; a lost son.  
In each parable, something is lost and then found and then there is rejoicing.

In this third parable and we find this younger son asking for his share of the estate.  
Unlike the first two parables, this one would not go over well with the Pharisees.  
They would be appalled at this request.  
The Pharisees lived respectable lives and this young man was despicable in their eyes.  
This is what they heard:  
Dad, I wish that you were dead.  
I can't wait for you to die to get what I want.  
I want what is coming to me right now.

The fifth commandment says, "Honor your father and your mother."  
And this was the worst thing that a child could do as far as being disrespectful.  
This young man was shameful in his actions.  
In fact, anyone who would dare to make a request like this would get a slap in the face and be thrown out of the house.  
And, if that weren't enough, they would say, "Kaddish," which means that he is dead.  
Many families would then do a funeral service and go forward acting as if these children were dead.  
Or, they would declare that they had never been born.  
As we will see, the older brother in this parable saw this just like the Pharisees did.  
He was outraged too.

What was this young man asking for?  
He wanted part of the whole estate.  
Remember that this was a working farm and the son was asking for:  
Land, animals and money.  
This means that the earning power of the father and the older brother would be greatly diminished.  
But the greatest loss would be the loss of respect in the community.  
No one would respect someone who raised a son like this.  
And worse, they would respect him much less if he didn't throw him out.  
This young man was seen as despicable.  
And the father was seen in the same light.

Now, in spite of all of the cultural norms and in spite of all of the loss of respect and earning power,  
What does the father do?

He gives the son everything he asks for.

This father is a prodigal.

He is seen to be recklessly spending his money and resources in a wastefully extravagant way and freely giving away the farm in a way that is not prudent.

Everyone could see this but the father.

His only guide is his love for his son.

This father gives like a prodigal and never stops loving his son.

I believe that this is the main point of this part of the story.

The Pharisees should have known of this kind of love as the scriptures are filled with accounts of God's love for His people in spite of their active rebellion.

So many times the Jews had rebelled.

God called them an adulteress people as they worshiped other gods.

They had made idols and asherahim poles and worship them.

They had become despicable.

Yet, time and time again, God would show them love and mercy.

Well, Jesus had come to do the work of the Father, and that was what He was doing.

Jesus was being patient with sinners.

Phil. 2:7 says that Jesus made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant."

He could have shown contempt for these outcasts but He was here to do the will of the Father.

In Heb. 12:2 we see that Jesus endured the cross and all the shame that went with it.

That was the heart of the Father.

That was the will of God.

And Jesus was doing all of the Father's will.

But the Pharisees had no love for these people.

So, we find that the father represents God showing love and Jesus doing the work of His Father.

This young man left the path of righteousness in search of all of the blessings that he thought were out in the world.

He didn't understand that in his father's house he had all that a young man could ever have.

He didn't understand that his father had loved him, provided for him and protected him.

He didn't understand that his father wanted the very best for him.

He may have seen the large chocolate rabbits out in the world and didn't know that they were hollow.

So this young man took his share of the estate and went to live like a prodigal.

He spent and wasted all that he had.

In a very short period of time he recklessly went through all of his resources.

He soon discovered that people can't eat pig food.

This young man who lived with all of the best ended up feeding pigs and trying to eat the pig's food.

And so at the point of starvation the young man came to his senses and started to think that maybe he made a mistake.

Some say that he repented but I think that this was a change in stomach and not a change in heart.

His plan was to ask his father to make him one of the hired men on the estate.

This young man could never have imagined that his father could love him so deeply.

As the story goes, the father, who may have been looking out every day for his son to come home, saw him and ran toward him.

Once again, the Pharisees would see this as shameful as a grown man of status never runs.  
And worse, why would you run to someone who had disrespected you this way?  
And, the Pharisees are starting to see that Jesus is comparing Himself to God.  
They were thinking, “No way would God act this way.”  
They saw this father as a prodigal.

He was wasting his love in a manor that was disgraceful.

But, then, not only does the father run out to the young man.

He puts his finest robe onto him.

A robe fit for royalty over a young man that smells like a pig.

No way would the Pharisees accept this kind of recklessness.

The father didn't even give the young man time to repent. **(Repeat)**

Nor did he give him time to take a shower.

He put his best robe right over the filth. **(Think about that!)**

He put a ring on his finger which gave him full authority to act on his behalf.

This ring signified power of attorney.

The father basically gave away the farm once again.

The Pharisees are thinking, “What kind of a fool does something like this?”

Then the father had a lamb killed and a feast made.

This is a celebration just like the ones that we saw in the story of the lost lamb and the lost coin.

Jesus tells us the reason for the celebration.

My son was dead and now he is alive.

He was lost just like the lamb and the coin but now he is found.

Of course, the real prodigal in this story is God.

God so loved the world that He was willing to run to us sinners.

He was willing to cover us with His own righteousness.

God ran to us before we even repent. **(Repeat)**

He loves us more than we could ever imagine.

God puts His Holy Spirit right over our filth.

Many think that Jesus didn't show any kind of love for the Pharisees; that he never had anything good to say to them.

But, today was the day!

This was about them.

In the parable, the father left the party and went out to invite the older son in.

Many miss this point but the Pharisees knew that they were the older son in the story.

By this parable Jesus was inviting the Pharisees to join the celebration.

Jesus was reaching out to all of the people who hated Him.

He was reaching out to the very people who would have Him killed.

To me, this is God at His very best!

This is the God who loves sinners.

This is the God who left His place in glory, the great feast, to come to save sinners.

Jesus goes on in the parable to state the older son's objections.

These are the same objections that the Pharisees had as they heard this story.

As we see in Verse 28 the older son becomes angry when he hears of the party.

He was so cold; he not only hated his brother but he hated his father too.

He becomes just as disrespectful as the younger son.  
The Pharisees were also angry and hated Jesus as this son hated his father.

The older son says, "All of these years I have slaved for you and obeyed all of your rules. (Verse 29)

He was just like the Pharisees; he looked good on the outside but had no love at all.

They never viewed themselves as people who needed forgiveness or mercy,

They saw themselves as God's slaves and servants.

God wants us to have a relationship with Him as children.

Children that are loved beyond measure.

These Pharisees weren't going to offer love, forgiveness, or mercy to anyone else.

They were showing their true colors. They were evil, they were despicable.

The older son says, "This son of yours is despicable; he's a prodigal; he's the worst of the worst.

Then Jesus let's the Pharisees know that He loves them too and that they are the chosen people.

Jesus says, "This lost brother of yours has come home."

"It's time for a celebration!"

"Please come into the party with us!"

Why do we worship?

We worship God because of His great love for us.

As you have heard this story, who do you relate to?

If you are like the son who left his father, you know your sin well.

You need to know that God wants you to come to celebrate; to worship!

You need to know that God loves you enough to die for your sins.

If you are like the son who has never left, if you are the good son,

You need to know that you are nothing like the father.

You are just as much a sinner in need of a savior as the other son.

But, today is your day!

God is asking you to come to the celebration.

Come and worship Him.

In Romans Chapter 11 we find that when Jesus returns, these older sons will come into the party.

Both brothers will be reconciled with God.

Behind the story is another story.

Our father has provided us with an abundant life.

But, none of us truly appreciate all that God provides for us.

One son leaves to find more,

While the other son can't see all that he has.

If any of you think, "I am not like either son, I am like the father."

Let me tell you, you are nothing like the father!

None of us are like Him!

We have a God who loves us fully and a God who provides for all of our needs; a God that is perfect.

In spite of the fact that we are nothing like Him, He loves us; He runs to us.

That is why we worship Him!

**Prayer and Benediction:**