

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

## An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 15- Luke 15:11-32**

### 267- The Son of Man Has Come to Seek and to Save That Which is Lost- Part 5

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December 14, 2014

#### **Luke 15:11-32**

**11 And He said, "A man had two sons.**

**12 "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them.**

**13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.**

**14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished.**

**15 "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.**

**16 "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him.**

**17 "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!**

**18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;**

**19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"**

**20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.**

**21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'**

22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet;  
23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;  
24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.  
25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.  
26 "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be.  
27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.'  
28 "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him.  
29 "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends;  
30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'  
31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.  
32 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.'"

To the Glory of God

Now, as I told you last week- the entire Chapter of **Luke 15** is about the Love of God coming into the cities and suburbs of our world to find lost sons and daughters. It's about the identity of Jesus Christ and the very meaning of His Mission in the world- both then and now.

So if you ask me what the point is of preaching on these ancient Parables in our day- it is because God wants us to be like Jesus- to receive the wicked people that nobody else wants- the immoral and horrible sinners, and to eat with them, and to seek and find lost sheep and lost coins and lost sons and bring them home to the Father.

Now I would say, that my first aim in preaching about this Parable is that you would see Jesus. It is interesting to note that Jesus did not end these parables with the Command, "*Go and do likewise.*"

And Luke did not end this chapter with: "*Go and imitate Jesus.*" So while I agree that we all should be about this business- these Parables are manifestly about what Jesus does- all by Himself.

So the first thing we should take away from these three Parables here in **Luke 15** is: "*Look at Jesus. See Jesus. Consider Jesus. Know Jesus. Learn what kind of Person it is that you say you trust and love and worship. Soak in the Shadow of Jesus. Saturate your soul with the ways of Jesus. Watch Him. Listen to Him. Stand in awe of Him. Let Him overwhelm you with the way He is.*"

So that's my first aim. And if I could succeed at just *that*- we would be so permeated with the beauty of this risky, painful, sacrificial, loving way of life, we could not do anything except pursue it.

Now when we come to a Parable like this, it's really critical for us to remember that the Bible is a Middle Eastern book. And it is an *ancient* Middle Eastern book. And that means that its Truths are set in a culture that is very distant from our own. We live in the western world- a couple of thousand years after these events, and so we have little first-hand experience with life in the Middle East- either ancient or modern. And it's all too easy for us to rip this story completely out of its context and to transport it into our modern world and make some applications that are minimalist, at best. But this parable deserves more than a bare-bones treatment. It is not a story that can be superficially understood as to its richness, and, therefore, its message.

There are nuances, there are subtleties here that are cultural attitudes and features that we must pay attention to- because they give this Parable its full meaning. But as we do that- we must remember that whatever the Bible meant to the people to whom it was written- it means to us today. Whatever Jesus meant to the people to whom He spoke this Parable on that day- is *exactly* what His Words should mean to us today.

But one of the sad realities of our modern world is that we're in a hurry to read the Bible and we rush to apply the Bible without ever really interpreting it. And in the relentless effort to always update the Bible- rather than understand it- we tend to ignore its original context- which hinders us greatly.

So if we are to draw out of this Parable of- the man who had two sons- that which God intended us to know and what He intended to reveal for our edification- it is *critical* that we understand that we must

hear it the way the audience of Jesus heard it on that day- and that is why- other than my Message on the glory of the Incarnation- I am going to spend the rest of this month going over this one single Parable.

You see, in the minds of the people who stood before Jesus on that day- there were ingrained ideas and ingrained cultural attitudes and ingrained patterns and unspoken feelings and sensibilities that were very powerful and that existed in the Middle-Eastern peasant village life. And while we would tend to simply by-pass all of that- these attitudes and feelings and sensibilities are the things that illuminate this Parable. These biases and prejudices and deep seated feelings are the things that make this Parable live and these are the things that will allow us to live in it- which is why we have to try to re-create them.

We must remember that Jesus Christ spoke to a Middle-Eastern peasant people- not to 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans. And all four Gospels basically address people in that context and framework. Even most of the educated people of that time would have their roots in very simple and basic agrarian village life. And much of what went on in their culture and in their social life and what was imbedded for generations in their sensibilities still exist even today in Middle-Eastern peasant life.

So there were things that were felt but never spoken. There were deep attitudes that are never articulated- not even consciously apprehended- because they have been in the subconscious for so long. But if we are to grasp the mastery of this great story and all its spiritual meaning- we've got to at least try to go back and do the best we can to put ourselves in that very place and time. We need to place ourselves in the attitudes and the expectations of a Middle Eastern peasant village culture so we can begin to find the richness of this story being illuminated to our minds.

Now before we look at the story, a bit of background so that we know where we are. At this point in Luke's Gospel account- Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem the very last few months of His life. He is intending to offer Himself as God's perfect Sacrifice for sin, die on the Cross, and then on the following Sunday morning- rise again from the dead- having fully accomplished the redemption of all of God's elect.

So the Lord has been ministering now for nearly three years and preaching the message of the Kingdom of God and repentance, and calling men and women to enter into the Kingdom of God through

repentance and faith in Him as the Messiah and the Lord God. And along the way- Jesus has developed some very powerful and relentless enemies- the Pharisees and the scribes.

And as we have studied- these men are basically the architects of the false, legalistic religion of Judaism at the time. They have their influence in the synagogues, which are the local assemblies of Jewish people where they come together to be taught. They are the primary influencing force. They are legalistic. They are corrupt inwardly. They are hypocritical. They are hostile to Jesus. And yet they have the greatest amount of influence and so you have basically a large group of people who, for the most part, are either violently hostile to Jesus or altogether indifferent toward Him. And that hatred ultimately comes down upon His Head as they scream for His Blood in Jerusalem and endeavor to take away His Life.

Now keep in mind that the resentment of the Pharisees and the scribes is due to the fact that Jesus directly confronted them on their hypocrisy. He identified them as self-righteous to their face and exposed their false religion as being of satan and not of God. Jesus told them to their face that they did not understand the Scriptures or the Will of God, and that- to a man- they did not know God at all. They did not know the true way of Salvation and they were completely excluded from the Kingdom of God because they were inwardly corrupt and they were headed for Divine Judgment.

And, of course- they didn't take too kindly to that. And even though Jesus said directly and repeatedly- He also said it with compassion and mercy and grace. But regardless of how Jesus said it- rather than be broken and repent- they hated Him all the more for it.

It is absolutely amazing that the one single Parable in all the Bible that gives such hope and that illustrates Grace and the Father's Love for His Own the best- is the very same Parable that incited the greatest degree of animosity and hatred from the religious elite.

And so one of the things that you should take away from this Parable when we complete it is this:

What made the Pharisees despise this Parable the most and what brought forth the greatest degree of animosity toward Jesus Personally- was also the single greatest illustration of the Grace of God toward undeserving sinners

And this is the way it is with legalism, in general. Because legalists are trying so hard to earn their own righteousness by what they do for themselves- inherent in their legalism- is a *belittling* and a *minimization* and an outright *rejection* of the only real and true Cause of our Forgiveness and our Righteousness- and that is the Grace of God.

So here is something to take away with you today. Any religion that has animosity toward Grace is evil. Any teaching that produces jealousy and envy toward the recipients of the Grace of God is of the devil. Any Doctrine that denounces sinners as being too dirty or too evil to be saved is destructive and any human philosophy that allows God's Grace to be belittled or minimized or outright rejected is not good or noble or pure and should be soundly condemned, and any Belief that allows for a single person on planet earth to think for a single second that Grace is somehow *optional* for him and that he can make it to heaven and stand in God's Presence due to his own level of obedience or some display of human effort- is the very epitome of a doctrine of devils.

And sadly, that is the insidious net result of *every* manifestation of legalism- regardless of what name it goes by. So we must know that Legalism- in all of its forms- is the enemy of the Grace of God, and the Grace of God- manifested to patently unworthy sinners- is the enemy of all Legalism.

So because we are all sinners, because we are all declared wicked and condemned by none other than God Himself, because there is none who are "good", and because none *deserve* or are *entitled* to either forgiveness or Salvation or Righteousness, and because God is under no obligation whatsoever to listen to or forgive or save a single soul- Grace- God's Amazing, Glorious Grace shines forth is all of its Brilliance and Majesty as we see- like the younger son in this parable- that Grace is the only game in town. So let's begin to examine this glorious parable by looking again at verse 11:

### **Luke 15:11**

**And He said, A man had two sons.**

... so that is really the name of this Parable- "The Parable of the Man Who Had Two Sons" or "The Parable of the Man and His Two Sons". But as we put this Parable in context with the other two we see a pattern developing:

- ✓ **Luke 15:1-7:** The Parable of the Lost Sheep
- ✓ **Luke 15:8-10:** The Parable of the Lost Coin

... and so in context- this Parable could be called,

### The Parable of the Lost Son

Now the word "Prodigal" is from the Latin "prodigus", which has to do with living a lavish lifestyle. And during the first 1850 years or so of the Church- this word was used quite often in many writings- both secular and religious- because living lavishly was always considered to be sinful and wrong and worldly and ungodly. Parents taught their children and teachers taught their students and preachers taught their congregations and Presidents taught the nation and Business owners taught their customers that living lavishly was sinful and wrong, and that loving money and being covetous was wicked.

At or near the mid-1800's- this word fell out of use- especially here in America- when the unprecedented prosperity that we see all around us today came into being- where today- the word is almost used exclusively in preaching and teaching this particular parable and not as a model of godly living. We need to know that the Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Doctrine that is so enormously popular in our day stands in fierce opposition to the words of Jesus here in this Parable- because instead of warning people about the insidious effects that money has on the human soul- this false doctrine actually promotes the concepts of loving money and being covetous as being spiritual *ideals* and *goals* and as signs that God is pleased with us- rather than as a description of being utterly lost and sinful.

So we need to remember that this word "Prodigal", and the title of this Parable, has to do with living lavishly as being a sign of a wicked and rebellious heart, and not simply describing a rebellious child- and as we get further into this Parable- we will see more about this.

So the Man had two sons and then the first part of verse 12 says:

#### **Luke 15:12a**

**The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.'...**

Now there is a lot to be said here about children inheriting the estate of the father- but the important aspect of this verse is how out of character the words of the younger son are. You see, in that culture- younger sons would not normally inherit *anything*.

The Jewish culture was established by God in the beginning as a natural and tangible and visible sign of the Love that God the Father had for God the Son. And so the first born son was everything to the Jews. He was to carry on the father's business as the father died and he alone would inherit whatever God has blessed the father with- with the stipulation that he would treat his mother and brothers and sisters with kindness and mercy.

So for this younger son to walk up to his father and demand "his share" of the estate was unheard of, and as Jesus was telling these Jews this part of the Parable- they would have let out an audible gasp- completely taken back at the audacity and wickedness of this son.

For this young man to walk up to his father and ask for "his share" of the estate would be the same thing as him telling his father:

- ✓ You are in my way
- ✓ I don't care anything about you
- ✓ I want my freedom away from you and your ways
- ✓ I want to be independent of you and your ways
- ✓ I want my money
- ✓ I wish you were dead (inheritance comes at death)

We must also remember that the people of the Middle East back then were basically an agrarian people- meaning that they worked the land, and so their wealth was tied up in land and in livestock and not in cash or investments. And so for this young man to want his share of the estate meant that the father would have to sell land or livestock or both and this would normally take some time and so by this time- as people began to question *why* the father was selling things- the scandal would have gotten out into the neighboring villages and gossip and tales would have been rampant, and the father would have been subjected to further scrutiny and ridicule and humility from the neighbors and the ruling elders.

But besides all this- children simply didn't talk that way to their parents. Remember that back in **Exodus 20:12** God commanded,



**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.**

... and in **Exodus 21:17**- God Almighty had said this about children disrespecting their parents:

**He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.**

... so the actions of this young man in this Parable was really very shocking to the Jews who were very big about protocol and about cultural ethics and about family. This younger man is showing absolute rejection of his father and so the Pharisees who were standing around hearing Jesus tell this story on that day would have been very amazed at how this story is unfolding.

Now keep in mind that Jesus emphasizes several key factors here on purpose to have great effect on the Jews who were listening to Him. For example- look at how Jesus begins verse 13:

**Luke 15:13**

**And not many days later...**

Now this shows us that the father was conducting what we would call a "fire sale". He was selling land and livestock and slaves and other things at just pennies on the dollar so he could do it quickly. And we can only imagine why he was doing this- probably to give the boy what he wanted as fast as possible to minimize the shame that this boy was bringing on himself and the family. So even in doing this- the father is thinking of his son and issuing grace here- even in *how* he gives the boy his share.

And another thing that was not said that would have spoken very loudly to the Pharisees is the fact that the older son does not rise up to defend his father here. The older son doesn't do or say anything to the younger son or to his father- showing that the older son had no love at all for either his father or his brother. So this man really has no relationship with either son.

So what Jesus is telling these Jews on that day is that here is God with two sons- who are both sinners- neither one has a correct relationship to God. And the younger son manifests his sin and

rebellion and lostness and his hostility toward God openly and outwardly while the older son manifests his lost condition and his hostility toward God by standing there allowing God to be used and blasphemed and doesn't say or do anything to stop it. But make no mistake about this- dear friends- both of these two sons are lost and both are sinful. The younger son is a visibly immoral sinner while the older son is a quiet religious sinner- but both are lost and neither one of these two sons loves his father.

And this gets even worse than land and livestock and other possessions because we need to remember that the duty of all Jewish fathers was to raise up their children in the ways of God. And so behind all that the younger man was telling his father here was that this younger son no longer wanted to be taught the ways of God and he wanted to rebel against and be independent from that which the father had *already* taught him. So not only was this younger man wanting to rebel against his father- he also wanted to rebel against God as well. So this is pretty bad.

Now the only thing worse than the way that this young man acted toward his father is the way that the father responded to the son- look at the last part of verse 12:

Luke 15:12b

**... So he divided his wealth between them.**

Now the Pharisees and every Jew back in that day knew that a godly father would have responded to the wickedness of his younger son by doing one of four things. The father would have:

- A. Slapped him across the face- publicly humiliating him
- B. Immediately disowned him and sent him away
- C. Taken him to a secluded place to kill him himself
- D. Taken him to the public square to be publicly stoned to death by the people

... but a *godly* father who had been taught and trained in the OT Scriptures would have *never* acquiesced to the sinful demands of his younger son. For the father to give in to these evil demands from the younger son would have been looked at as condoning sin and rebellion,

and so while his response may have been tempered with sadness and grief- nevertheless a good and godly father would have *never* done what this father did here.

Now right about now- the Pharisees who were standing there listening to Jesus give this Parable were getting very disturbed. Because it *seems* as though Jesus was linking God the Father to the father in this story. But the way that this father was reacting to his sinful son was totally out of character with what the Pharisees had been taught about the Nature of God and God's Righteousness, and this was completely at odds with the way that God had been displayed to the people through the teachings of the Pharisees for many years now. Look again at verse 20:

### **Luke 15:20**

**So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.**

And look again at verses 22- 24:

### **Luke 15:22-24**

**22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet;**

**23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;**

**24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.**

But the Jews didn't know any such "god" that would act like this toward wicked sinners. The false "god" that they knew would have destroyed the younger son immediately without any mercy, and would have never been so soft as to dishonor His Own Righteousness by running to the son to embrace him and celebrate his return after he had acted that way.

And this goes to the very heart of the issue of Salvation and Grace and how God's Mercy interacts with God's Righteousness, and why Jews both then and now utterly reject Justification by Grace through Faith alone as being an attack against the Righteousness of God.

And it also goes to the issue of how meaningless the Grace of God has become to the average church goer today. The very commodity that is talked about and sung about and prayed about more than any other is the very commodity that is misunderstood and marginalized and relegated the most to being nothing more than "leniency" where God is a senile Old fogey Who allows us to get away with sin or is so blind that He doesn't see our sin anymore, and people today see Grace as having little or no regard to the Righteous Requirement of God to judge all sin and to never allow guilty people to go free. Remember how God Almighty described Himself to Moses in **Exodus 34:6&7**

**6 Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;**

**7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty unpunished*, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."**

If God leaves the guilty unpunished- He has sinned against His Own Character and Nature and would cease to be God, and would Himself be guilty of violating the Divine Principle behind **Proverbs 17:15** which says:

**He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.**

Those who are working so hard to earn God's Favor do not appreciate God's Grace and Mercy toward underserving sinners- in fact, they despise it. And so legalists despise the Grace of God, they look at Grace as a weakness, as a problem, as something that brings dishonor to God, and something that wars against His Righteousness. I call this the "Jonah Syndrome".

Jonah was chosen by God to go and preach repentance to the people of the wicked city of Nineveh. And he ran away from the Presence of the Lord- *not* because he was afraid of the people of that great city and *not* because he was afraid that God would judge them. No, Jonah knew the Character of God and knew that God was more

willing to forgive than we are to repent- so Jonah was afraid that the people would heed his preaching and believe what he would tell them and become convicted and repent and trust in God, and that God would show them Mercy and Grace and forgive and save them. In other words- Jonah despised the sinners and wanted God to judge them- not save them. And so in reality Jonah was bigger sinner than the people of Nineveh.

And Jonah didn't want God to forgive these wicked pagans and so he ran away from God and from his calling, and God had to convince Jonah to go to Nineveh, and so God sent him a taxi cab that took him right to where God wanted him to go, and while Jonah was in the belly of the whale- God brought conviction to Jonah, and so he went and he preached one sermon and God touched the hearts of 500,000 people and they all repented and turned to God and begged God for Mercy and they fasted and God heard them and moved upon them.

And so Jonah's reaction to the Grace of God being poured out on undeserving sinners was to pout and throw a fit and accuse God of being softhearted and a sap.

You see, what the legalists don't understand is that in all their effort to work to earn God's Favor- they, too, are sinners in need of Grace. But the legalism that has deceived them has blinded them to that need. In other words- the legalist is just as sinful as the other, he is just as fallen, and he is in just as much need as the other one- only he doesn't know that.

And even though he will clearly acknowledge that he is not sinlessly perfect- the legalism that has overtaken him blinds him to that fact and he thinks that because he is trying so hard- God will "see his heart" and reward him with Forgiveness and Salvation. And you hear people say this all the time:

- *"God knows my heart"*
- *"God sees my heart"*
- *"When God looks at my heart He sees only love for Him"*

... or some variation of that. Yes, God sees your heart, dear friend, and when He sees your heart- He sees sin and rebellion and destruction and anger and malice and blasphemy and wickedness. And the deeper God looks into your heart- the blacker and worse it looks.

And so the legalist despises the one who trusts in God Grace because he doesn't see them trying as hard to earn Forgiveness and Salvation as he is.

So we have the eternal problem of how does God show Mercy to underserving sinners who have sinned repeatedly against God's Character and Glory, and yet remain Righteous and judge all sin and not allow a single guilty person to go free? How can God show me Mercy if I am guilty of belittling His Glory? And, yet, if God does not show me Mercy- I have no hope? So how do we reconcile this very serious issue?

And let me say that Biblical Christianity is the only religion that has an answer to that problem. No other religion allows for God to be both Merciful and Righteous to the same person at the same time. And the reason why Christianity has an answer is because of Jesus.

God remained Righteous because He judged our sins- we just didn't have to pay for our sins ourselves. God imputed all of our sins on Jesus, and then God poured the full fury of His Wrath and Righteous Anger against our sins on Jesus- on the Cross- and that allowed God to be merciful to us- without sinning against His Own Justice. Or in the words of the songwriter:

My sin O the bliss of this glorious thought  
My sin- not in part- but the whole  
Was nailed to His Cross and I bear it no more  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord O my soul!

and

When satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end to all my sin  
Because the sinless Savior died  
My sinful soul is counted free  
For God the Just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me

The majesty of Grace lies in the fact that it is patently *unfair*- that we do *not* deserve it, that we have *not* earned it, and that God is *not* obligated to give it. Grace is amazing because it is entirely free and based- not upon how far we have fallen or deeply we have sinned or how hard we have worked for it- but Grace is based only on God's Own Free Prerogative to forgive and save those whom He has chosen.

And *in* Grace and *by* Grace and *through* Grace and Grace alone- the Reformers gave us the Latin phrase "Sola Gratia", by Grace Alone- all of our sins were judged- yet we were *not* judged! All of our sins were damned forever- yet we stand forgiven! Divine Justice was executed against our all of our sins- but not on us! Our sins are in hell right now experiencing Divine Retribution against them- and yet we are bathed in Mercy and Love and will live forever with Jesus! How could this be?

Jesus Christ took our place and God damned our sins while Jesus bore them- even though He was Personally sinless- and that allows God to remain Just and Righteous. Or as the Apostle Paul said in **2Corinthians 5:21**

**He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

Now notice what happens to the son after he leaves the father. Look again at **Luke 15:13-16:**

**13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.**

**14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished.**

**15 "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.**

**16 "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him.**

And this is the Passage where we make the statement:

Sin will take you where you never thought you would go, and it will keep you there longer than you wanted to stay, and it will cost you more than you are willing to pay.

So like *everybody* who venture out into sin- this young man went out thinking that he could handle it and that he wouldn't fall into the same pitfalls as everybody else had before him, and he thought that he wouldn't give in to the real bad areas- because somehow he thought that he was exempt from sin doing to him what sin has done to everybody else.

I want you to also notice the phrase in verse 13 that says:

**... went on a journey into a distant country**

Isn't it amazing that when people have been raised to serve the Lord and they become rebellious- that they always think that it is their geography that is the problem. They always think that if they could only get away from their parents or away from the ways of God or away from what they have been taught that everything will then magically get better. And so they engage in a way of life where the end will be that nobody would ever even guess that they were raised to love and serve God.

\*Now the phrase that reads in English "**loose living**" in verse 13 is where we get the word "prodigal" from. And I really like the King James translation of this word as "**riotous living**" because I think it gives us a better understanding of what this looks like. I have walked into places that looked like they were engaged in riotous or loose living and I turned around and walked out because even though I'm not going to preach on riotous or loose living this morning- I know that the Bible declares that God hates loose living or prodigal living or riotous living or living freely without the fear of God tempering and restricting our behavior. So to live loosely is to be a prodigal and is sinful in God's Eyes. It is to live in opposition to or in rebellion to the Lordship Demands over our lives and Jesus' Lordship Restraints on our behavior that God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit makes in the Scriptures.

Now, in addition to "The Jonah Syndrome" there is another syndrome that we need to understand and that is "The Nineveh Syndrome". Look at the end of verse 16:

**... and no one was giving *anything* to him**



... which is another way of saying that he was having a real hard time and people were seeing his hard time and not helping him. Now the Bible gives us a Divine Principle about this in says in **Ecclesiastes 7:14**

**In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider — God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him.**

... in other words- when things become difficult in our lives- that is the time that we should "consider". Now the English word "consider" comes from the Hebrew word that means: *to look intently; to discern; to regard; to give attention to; to find out; and to observe.*

72 times in the Bible- God tells us "to consider". So we are to consider when things get hard, we are to look intently, we are to discern, to regard, we are to give attention to it, and we are to observe just what is happening. And in doing that- we are to find out if sin has overtaken our lives and has blinded us and has deceived us, and we are to discern whether God is mercifully issuing a hard time to bring us to a place of repentance and change. We are not told to panic or to throw up our hands and give up- we are told to simply "consider".

So there is no doubt that God uses events to cause us to consider, and this young man who was consumed with riotous and loose living was having a real hard time and he became a pariah- even among the pagans he was with.

Now back in the Old Testament days- God sent Jonah to preach repentance to the wicked people of Nineveh, and as we have seen- they did repent and they did turn to God and God moved upon them. But some years later- another generation rose up in Nineveh who knew not God and they desired to live loosely and riotously before the Lord and instead of fearing God- they built a wall.

\*And this wall was over 100 feet high and was so large that four chariots could run abreast at the top. And in their feeble minds they said to one another, "*God can't tear this wall down.*" And so they felt safe and comfortable to continue to sin with abandon- free from the Judgment of God. And God sent the prophet Nahum to tell them this time that he was going to destroy wall and all- and that they would never rebuild the city again. And God did that and to this day- the city

lies in ruins- a testimony against the futility of "The Nineveh Syndrome".

And this is a huge issue with us today. People desire to sin against God- but they don't want to pay the price for their sinning. And so through the building of walls around their sin- they are not brought to a place of godly sorrow over their sins and they have no desire to repent. And so rather than afflict their souls and repent and turn from their wicked deeds- they build a wall to keep the Judgment of God away from them. And so they look to medicine to heal them when they are sick because of their sins, and they look to Government to help them when they have a bad time due to the life of sin they are engaged in, and they look to technology and science and anything except to God- because they know that to look to God would require them to repent and they certainly don't want to do that.

So the Nineveh Syndrome is when people desire to sin *safely*- without any repercussions, when they desire to sin- *happily*- with no remorse and no godly sorrow and no change of behavior and no alteration of thinking. And when they get sick or they are broke or they are hurt or when they are damaged or when their joy diminishes- they cry to Man to come and fix them so they can continue to sin without paying any price.

And people who do that are fighting against God and God's Plan of conviction and God's Ways of Mercy. But thanks be to God that the young man in this Parable had not built that wall around his heart. And Jesus says at the beginning of verse 17:

**Luke 15:17a**

**But when he came to his senses...**

or literally in the Greek- it reads:

When he was brought to sense...

So there was a moment, an event, and a time in God's Economy when this sinful young man considered and was "brought to sense". Sin had made him stupid and he was living in a way that was not only dishonoring to God but destructive to him as well.

But there was a time- theologians call it "Effectual Calling" or "Irresistible Grace"- when God mercifully chose to sovereignly *interrupted* his sinning, God stepped in and *inserted* Himself into the life of this young man, a time when God *overrode* the will of this sinner and God called this young man's name, and even though this man had heard the Truth many times before- his ears were deaf and his eyes were blind and his heart was a heart of stone, and he could not hear, he could not see, and he could not believe.

But at this moment- this man heard the Voice of God and Jesus said in **John 5:25**:

**Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.**

This is Sovereign Regeneration where God- all by Himself- goes inside the lost sinner- *before* he asks for it and *before* he wants it and *before* he can cooperate with it, and God sovereignly *births* this man again or gives him spiritual life, and in doing that- God transforms his nature and gives him eyes to see and ears to hear and an heart to believe. And look at the immediate response of this young man in **Luke 15:18&19**:

**Luke 15:18&19**

**18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;**

**19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"**

In other words- this young man was saying, "*What happens to me is no longer of any concern to me. I have sinned and I am not worthy of any mercy or any grace or any good or nice thing. But I know that all will be well with me if only I can get back to father's house.*"

And this is the response of *everyone* who is genuinely called by God and who experiences Sovereign Regeneration. And Lord willing- we will look at the amazing conclusion to this Parable on December 28<sup>th</sup>.

Amen. Let's pray.