

If your Bible has a caption before each section, it will put, before this parable of Jesus, the caption: “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” What does prodigal mean? Maybe we’re not all that clear on this. It means reckless and wasteful. A prodigal person is someone who wastes what he has in an extravagantly reckless manner.

Okay, so we can understand why this son is labeled as a prodigal. He recklessly wastes what he is given from his father on himself. But that’s only part of the story. It ignores the older brother, the reason why Jesus tells the parable, because the Pharisees and scribes are the older brother in it. But even more, if the focus is on the prodigal in the parable, it’s not on the father of these two sons. And he, really, should be our focal point. His love, his warmth, his forgiveness. And we can even say, his *prodigality*. This father wastes, from how it looks to us, his love and kindness on his two sons. He is as reckless in giving as his youngest son is in spending, and his oldest son is in rejecting. Perhaps, therefore, we should call this story, “The Parable of the Prodigal Father.”

This is our God. This is who He is. He is extravagant in giving of Himself to all His children, whether His children are more like the youngest son or more like the older brother.

Now it is true that the youngest son in the parable is quite the prodigal. He asks for his share of the inheritance, even before his father is dead, and he immediately turns the property he is given into cash, and goes off to waste it all on himself.

What a selfish, ungrateful son he is! Reminds me of myself. Because every sin I commit against my Heavenly Father is a purely selfish and ungrateful act. What about you?

Oh, we know prodigals. They’re all around us. They’re in our circle of friends. They are within our families. But there is, also, a prodigal in all of us. We waste, on ourselves, on our selfish lusts, what our Heavenly Father so generously gives us. That makes us prodigals. And every sin that we contemplate committing, and follow through with doing, puts us in the shoes of the prodigal son in the parable. And we wave good-bye to our Heavenly Father and go off, as the boy does, to live for ourselves.

What a horrible place to be! Oh, the boy is having a grand old time living it up out there. But he is lost and just doesn’t know it. He is dead, spiritually, yet he would not believe it. He would say, “This is living! I’m really living now! I have finally found myself!”

When God’s children are lost and dead like this, how we need what happens to this young prodigal. He runs out of money. And a severe famine takes over the land.

Maybe you were there at one time. Maybe your loved one is there right now. Our Heavenly Father brings such famines to bring our sinful living to a halt. But do all His children repent and come back to Him when this happens? No. Many still have not hit rock bottom. They are not yet in the pig pen with the pigs. They are not yet starving for what they really need – the love of their Heavenly Father. They have not yet come to their senses.

This boy does. He repents as he wallows in the mud of the pig pen. But he has been away from his father for so long that he is way off in his understanding of what repentance truly is. He begins well. *"I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'"*

This is good. This is repentance. But he is dead and lost, and so his understanding is wrong, for he will also add these words: *"Treat me as one of your hired servants."*

No! How dare he say that! What he is thinking is that he will pay for his wrongs. He will make restitution for what he did. As a hired servant, he will in time earn enough money to pay his father back for what he wasted. This is a face-saving plan. He will save himself. He wants no grace. It is not true repentance. It is repentance with conditions attached.

But it never happens. You know why not? Because when prodigal son meets prodigal father, this boy is overwhelmed by his father's grace. His father runs to meet him. He embraces him and kisses him. This is acceptance back into the family. This is pure grace before the son can even say a word. Moved by his father's grace, he does repent, but he leaves off the words to make him a hired servant, for he is simply overwhelmed by grace.

Here we have, in a most beautiful way, the love of God for sinners like us. This is how He deals with His children who need His warmth and acceptance. In the embracing love of the father for his sinful son we see these inviting words of our Lord: *"Whoever comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out."* And the evidence for this is at His cross. Look where His arms are. Exactly where the father's arms are in the parable. They are stretched out to embrace one and all. No one is left out of Jesus' embrace on the cross. No one's sins are left unforgiven. Jesus paid for them all. Jesus is the One who made restitution for everything that you and I have done.

Jesus is the Prodigal of all prodigals. He sheds His blood for everyone. He is reckless with this. No one can say: "Jesus did not include me." Oh yes, He did! His blood avails for all. Even for the older brother. But the older brother does not want it. He does not think he is in need of grace. *"I never disobeyed your command,"* he says to his father. He, too, is lost and dead. He just doesn't know it, and he would never believe it.

How sad that he refuses to enter into the father's house to join in the feast, for this feast is one of joy because a sinner has repented and been accepted back into the family. This is the joy that your God has over you. There is nothing He loves more than to receive sinners, to forgive sinners, to cause the angels in heaven to rejoice over even one sinner who repents.

No matter where you have been or what you have done, your Heavenly Father has, for you, only arms that are open with warmth and love. He forgives your sins. He welcomes you with pure joy. Today, the angels in heaven are rejoicing, for today, here in the Father's house is the feast of joy. And you are here with sins forgiven, with a Father's welcome; your loving and forgiving Prodigal Father. Amen.