

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

TODAY'S TEXT

Text: **Luke 15:11-32**

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. ²⁵ Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

FIRST THOUGHTS

"A banquet of great joy is provided by this waiting [Father], who is none other than the waiting, running, embracing, partying, and kissing God. The parable describes God's goodness, grace, boundless mercy and abundant love." Paul John Isaak

Have you ever noticed how many children's films are about the main character being separated from a father?

- *An American Tail* relates the story of Fievel, a mouse whose curiosity leads him to a forbidden part of a ship full of immigrants. In a terrible storm, Fievel is swept out to sea and spends the rest of the film trying to find his papa.
- *Finding Nemo* is about a little clown fish who rebels against his father's wishes, gets caught by a diver in the ocean, and ends up in an aquarium in a dentist's office. The film shows Nemo's dad, Marlin, traversing the ocean past sharks and jellyfish in order to find his son.
- *Annie* is about an orphan girl longing to be reunited with her parents.
- *Home Alone* tells the story of a boy who wishes his family was gone (and comes to regret that wish)
- Even grown-up movies contain the theme, as the popularity of Liam Neesons' *Taken* films shows us.

° Why do you think these stories resonate with us?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The three parables in Luke 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) came within an environment that heightened the drama of their stories. The religious leaders were complaining about Jesus welcoming notorious sinners to His table. In response, Jesus gave series of stories, and the third one was especially pointed – casting Himself in the role of the loving father and His opponents in the role of a resentful elder brother. Watch how the story begins.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

> Read **Luke 15:11-19**

- ° In what ways might our actions whisper to our God what the younger son shouted to his father?
- ° How do we profit from God's blessings without thought for the responsibilities that accompany them?

Jesus' dramatic parable continues with the youngest son converting his newly obtained property into cash. When the disgraceful deed was done, the prodigal son headed off to a far country, where he squandered all his wealth in reckless living. The boy wasted his money and life, so when the famine came, he wound up desperate. Jesus described him going and hiring himself out to one of the citizens of that country.

- What are some common examples today of ways we might squander the good gifts of God?
- In what ways does the squandering of God's gifts lead to slavery instead of freedom?

> Read Luke 15:20-24

The crucial moment in Jesus' story occurs as the son approaches his hometown. Jesus tells us the father saw his son while he was still a long way off. This implies that the boy was probably at the edge of town, ready to head down the main street (which was usually the road that almost everyone in the village lived on).

- Make a list of several characteristics communicated by the father's actions.
- How are these characteristics true of God?
- How can they be true of us?
- In what ways does the father's treatment of his son go beyond what anyone expected?
- In what ways does God's treatment of us go beyond what we might hope for?

> Read Luke 15:25-32

- How can our "good deeds" be a way of walling ourselves off from a relationship with God?
- Are you more likely to see your Christian life as the drudgery of a servant or a feast for a son? Why?
- What are some ways having a closed-off heart to God will lead to a closed-off heart to sinners who find forgiveness?
- How does the gospel challenge and transform closed-off hearts?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

You're invited to step up onto the stage and act out the parable's final scene. Will you enter the house of God and become a part of God's family? Or will you stay out in the field, settled on working and doing without any thought as to having a true relationship with the Father? Won't you come in? Won't you become a part of the reason for celebration? The story's grand finale lies in your hands.

UPCOMING LESSONS

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| 12/09/18 | Jesus the Storyteller Week 5: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector |
| 12/16/18 | Jesus the Storyteller Week 6: The Wicked Tenants |

READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

2nd - Romans 9-12 | **3rd** - Romans 13-16 | **4th** - Ephesians 1-4 | **5th** - Ephesians 5-6; Psalm 119; 1-80 | **6th** - Philippians 1-4 | **7th** - Colossians 1-4 | **8th** - 1 Timothy 1-4