Luke 15:11-32; Luke 15:1-7; The Parable of the Lost Son I. The Wayward Son’s Return II. The Loving Father’s Embrace

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, family conflict is never easy. The relationship between parents and their children can be strained by either the actions of the parent or the child. And sometimes, that hurt and conflict can last for years- even decades. But perhaps you have also heard of death bed reconciliation. That before the parents die, the children return home and there is weeping, confession and reconciliation. Well, this weeping and reconciliation is what we find in our parable today. Luke 15 will be the last parable that we consider in our parable series- and we will spend two weeks considering this the longest of the parables. In the specific context, this parable is the culmination of the Parables of the Lost Things. Luke 15 includes 3 parables- and with each parable there is a heightened sense of urgency! First we have 1 lost sheep out of 100. Second, there is 1 lost coin out of 10. And third, we have 1 lost son out of 2. And to be clear, the specific context in Luke 15 is that sinners and tax collectors are drawing near to Jesus while the pharisees and scribes are pulling away! The sinners and tax collectors are embracing the words of Jesus, while the Pharisees and scribes are recoiling. The sinners are rejoicing at the words of life- while the Pharisees are grumbling at the fact that Jesus is willing to receive and eat with sinners. So the point of this parable is going to highlight the welcoming and rejoicing nature of Jesus this week. Next week we will focus on the wicked refusal to rejoice when sinners are saved. So this week we consider the lost son who is restored to the family. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ rejoices in the restoration of lost sinners in the parable of the Lost Son.

**I. The Wayward Son’s Return**

In our first point, we consider the wayward son- often called the prodigal son. Now the word “prodigal” means wasteful or reckless – and that is the lifestyle that this young man chooses. So we start in v. 12 with this younger son asking his father for his share of the property. Now normally, if there were 2 sons, the youngest would get 1/3 of all the property at the death of his father. But the fact that this son asks for the property before his father was dead is quite shocking- and quite an insult. It was basically made clear that this son thought that he would be better off if his father was dead- it was an insolent and rebellious request. And yet, the father agrees with it! Amazingly, the father will allow his assets to be placed in the name of his younger son. And as soon as the assets were in his name, the son liquidates the assets and cashes out in v. 13. Not many days later, the son sells the land and the buildings which in fact also robs his father of stability- and this rebellious son gathers all that he has and moves into a far country. This son could not wait to get away from his father and his home country, for the things that he wants to do will not be accepted by his own people. The wicked life that this man wants to live is one that must be done in secret- away from the prying eyes of his family and home church. Sin hides in the darkness- so this man goes off to live among and like the gentiles. This happens far too often- like when a college student goes off to a state school- and quickly unleashes his rebellious desires. Living like a heathen- doing things that he would never have done while he lived at home. So this prodigal son takes the money and wastes it on wine and women- - reckless living as v. 13 concludes. But all too soon, his money runs out. The worldly friends he gained have no interest in him when he is poor, and to make matters worse, the country experiences a famine. Now what will he do? With no money and no family or friends, this man hires himself out to feed pigs for a gentile farmer. For a Jewish man, this would be unheard of as pigs are unclean. But even the unclean animals have it better than him- as he longs to eat the pods that the pigs enjoyed in v. 16. Carob pods grow on shrubs in the Middle East, and they look like the seed pod of a locust tree. But no one noticed him- and no one gave him anything. Even the pig’s food was withheld. This is an important point and reminder- sin promises plenty but only takes away! Sin promises enjoyment and pleasure- but in the end this man has nothing. Sin bankrupts you- it steals whatever good gifts you had and brings only sorrow to those who foolishly think that sin can satisfy. With no food, friend or family, this man is brought down to the dust. He is in the gutter- in the pit of despair! And that is exactly where he needs to be! It will take the loosing of all earthly pleasure for this man to see his desperate state! It takes the removal of all creaturely comfort for this man to see his sin! So we have the switch thrown in 15:17- this man comes to his senses. Where once he had lived like a wild animal- longing to eat the pods that the pigs had- or to eat grass like the wild beasts- now his right mind is returned to him! He comes to his senses- and he remembers the former blessings of the covenant and the communion of the saints! God, by the inner working of His Spirit, brings this man to an end of himself! Where once he was blind, now he sees! He woke up- if you will- he was enlightened and his sanity restored! Notice the process and change that is evident. First, he has a conviction and confession. He sees his sin- acknowledges his rebellion. Second, he has hope for pardon. Turing away from his sin, he eyes turn to home as he longs for restoration. He leaves the pig pen and makes up his mind to return home. And third, he believes that his father’s love will show him mercy. He is encouraged by the faithfulness and love of his faith- and he dares to hope that his father will receive him. As we saw last week, every sin can be forgiven man. Even the sin of rebellion like this- sins committed in the darkness when no one else is around- sins of addiction- sins committed with wine and woman- reckless living- the sins of your youth. All these can be forgiven- and that truth is what enables this man to turn from the pig pen and return home! To this man- it would be better to be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tent of the wicked! These were the sinners and tax collectors of v. 1 who had returned from their life of evil only to find a loving embrace! Specifically, this parable applies to covenant breakers. Those who had been raised in a covenant home only to turn their back on God and His people! The black sheep if you will- who knew all the answers and enjoyed the benefits of a Christian home only to walk away. These sinners who are brought to an end of themselves- who are restored by God’s grace- are a testimony to the loving power and persistence of our gracious savior! Truly He seeks until He finds!

**II. The Loving Father’s Embrace**

So next, lets consider this loving embrace found in our parable. After the wayward son rehearses what he will say to his father, he starts the long journey home. It often takes falling to the rock bottom before people start to see the truth about their situation. This young man has only one source of hope- to go back to the father and plead for forgiveness. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him. Think of how much it must have hurt the father to let his son go back in v. 11. The stubborn child was granted his request- in the hope that this son would one day restored! So while the son is away, the father is watching and waiting. As v. 20 put it, while the son was far off, the father sees, feels compassion, ran, embraced and kissed. All before the son could even get a word in, the father proves his love. The rejection in the foreign land is replaced by acceptance in the household of God! Now this particular parable is not teaching us that God is waiting on man to make the first move. God is not sitting on the sidelines waiting for man to make the first move towards Him- for how can dead people rise up and walk home. No, it is the Spirit that enables dead sinners to hear, repent, believe and return home. But rather the focus of this parable is on the love of God- specifically the love of Jesus! This parable is describing the good shepherd that seeks until he finds the 1 lost little lamb! Jesus is the father in our parable- who rejoices when the lost son is finally brought home! And to be clear, it is the father in our parable the restores this relationship. The father puts his ring on his son’s finger- shoes on his feet and a robe around his back. It is the father that takes this son home and makes him not a slave or a servant- but a welcomed son again! Indeed, the joy of Jesus in the restoration of lost sinners is clear in this chapter. IN 15:6 and again in 15:9- and in the party that is thrown in v. 22-24 it becomes clear, Jesus rejoices when sinners are restored! When the wondering son is brought home! Even as our parable ends in v. 32- it was fitting to celebrate and be glad- for this brother was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found! Although we do not think about it very often, do you know that God rejoices when sinners are restored! God rejoices over the return of the lost lamb! Psalm 51 says that we can be restored to the joy of God’s salvation! As we find in Luke 15:7- there is joy in heaven over a sinner who repents! And again in 15:10- there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents! I submit to you that not only do angels rejoice when a sinner repents- no only do the saints in glory rejoice when a sinner repents- God Himself rejoices when a sinner repents! Now it is true that God always knew who the elect ones are- and He knows who will repent- but that does not stop Him from rejoicing when that repentance is seen! When the sinner comes to see his depravity and he repents- our God rejoices to welcome that sinner home as a son! Or as Zephaniah 3 puts it; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing! As a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you as Isiaah 62 records. Stated in the negative, God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked as Ezekeil 33 puts it. Positively, our God in heaven rejoices to see the work of Jesus applied to sinners! Jesus specifically rejoices to welcome sinners home as sons! Jesus runs to meet them- as v. 20 says. He covers them with the kiss of peace and the clothing of righteousness! Thankfully- our God is much more willing to forgive than we sometimes are. And think of the great loss that the father in our parable suffered. He lost 1/3 of his estate! And think of the shame- to welcome back this straying son- even to run out to embrace him! Grown men don’t run in the middle east! But this man does! This is the love of our gracious God! The warm embrace of our loving savior! He would cloth, feed, welcome, identify and celebrate at the return of this lost lamb! If our God is not too proud to celebrate the restoration of a lost sinner- who are we to grumble when the lost are found.

As we close, this parable reveals that true repentance is turning from the pigpen to go home to God. By repenting and believing, the lost are found and the alienated are restored. Godly repentance is a work of God- and it is a reason to rejoice- because Godly repentance leads to life! Just as the repentant son in our parable was restored and welcomed home, all those who repent and believe in Jesus will be embraced, kissed, clothed and celebrated over! Jesus Christ rejoices in the restoration of lost sinners in the parable of the Lost Son. No lamb is so far afield that Jesus cannot bring them home- no prodigal son so far gone that he cannot be restored! With God, all things- including the restoration of sinners- is possible! Praise God for His love- that He would receive and eat with sinners like you and me!