

POWER

“. . . the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation . . .” (Romans 1:16)

THE PRODIGAL SON: A YOUNG MAN WHO CAME TO HIMSELF & CAME HOME TO HIS FATHER (PART 2)

by Wade L. Webster

In the first installment of this study, we noticed the rebellion and the repentance of the Prodigal Son. In this final portion of our study, we want to notice his restoration.

The Restoration of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20-32)

When the prodigal son came to himself, it was just a matter of time before he came home. He took a single step and made the journey of a thousand miles. No doubt, as he made this journey, he thought about what he would find when he got home. Would he find condemnation or compassion? Would the door be slammed in his face? Would his father talk with him at all or send a servant to merely shoo him away? What would his brother's reaction be? What would the people of the town whisper about him as he walked past? Likely, these were all thoughts running through his mind. Was he ever tempted to turn back around? We do not know.

Whatever the prodigal son's expectations were as he made his way home, they were far exceeded in a good way by his father. In his wildest dreams, he never could have imagined his father doing what he did. Perhaps the only part of the return that was as he expected was the reaction of his elder brother. Likely, that is the reaction he expected across the board. However, it is not what he found, at least, not with the father. Let us examine the surprise ending that Jesus gave to the story.

A Pitiful Father

The prodigal's father was pitiful in a good way. He was full of pity for his son. Inrig noted that the three parables of Luke 15 “tell us not so much about a lost sheep as a seeking shepherd, not so much about a lost coin as a searching woman, not so much about a lost son as a loving father” (13). I think that he is right. In fact, many think that the parable should be called the Parable of the Loving Father. For sure, the parable paints a wonderful picture of him. Someone noted that the prodigal lost everything in the far country except his father's love (Wiersbe, Classic Sermons 34).

Someone imagined the following scene: One day the prodigal knocked on the pig farmer's door and declared, “I'm going home to my father.” The pig farmer replied, “Your father will take one look at you and one whiff of you, and send you back.” “Sir,” the prodigal answered, “You don't know my father.”

It is in this portion of the parable that we come to know the prodigal's father. I can assure you that we will not be disappointed.

The Compassion

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him (Luke 15:20).

Although the prodigal son left no indication that he was ever coming home when he left for the far country, the father never stopped looking for him to do so. He hoped against hope in the return of his son. Then, one day, his hope was realized. He saw someone coming down the road. Could it be? Were his eyes playing a cruel trick on him? No, it was him. It was really him. He could recognize that stride anywhere. He knew that silhouette. Even clothed in rags and covered with mud, that was his boy. Every feature of his son had been treasured in memory (Dunam 139). Even a great way off, he knew that it was his son. D. L. Moody noted that the father was looking through the telescope of his love (Wiersbe, Classic Sermons 46).

The first emotion that the father felt was compassion. Even though his son had tarnished the family name, the father's heart was moved with compassion for his son. In the far country, the prodigal son “learned the meaning of misery; but back home” he discovered “the meaning of mercy (Wiersbe, Bible 236).” Someone noted, “Condescension ran to meet the son, love fell on his neck, grace kissed him, wisdom clothed him, truth gave him the ring, peace shod him, wisdom provided the feast, and power prepared it” (Wiersbe, Classic 145).

The father did not wait for his son to reach the house. He did not force his son to take every painful step. He did not make his son wait at the gate. He shortened the distance by running to meet his son. It was unheard of in that day for a man of the father's stature and means to run. However, the father did not care. He gathered up his garment in his hands and ran as fast as he could to see his son.

When the prodigal's father reached him, he fell on his neck and kissed him. Although the translators did their best to capture the emotion, the Greek is far more expressive than the English. Literally, the father hugged him down. In other words, the father embraced his son with such emotion that they both went to the ground. Then, the father kissed him again and again (Butler 540-41). Anyone else would not have touched the boy. However, the father did not hesitate to lavish love upon him.

Mary Lu Walker had a son who left home without telling anyone where he was going. For some time there was no contact with his family.

Finally, after weeks, a telephone call came, and a question, “Can I come home?” Out of that question, came the following song, entitled **Runaway Song:**

If I ran away today, if I made you cry,
If I traveled far and wide and never told
you why,

But if I found the times were hard,
And I was all alone,
Could I still come home to you,
Could I still come home?
Could I knock upon your door,
And would you let me in?
Would you be glad to see me, even though
I'd been

So long, So long away from home,
So long, So long away from home,
If you ran away today, if you made me cry,
If you traveled far and wide
And never told me why,
But if you found the times were hard,
And you were all alone,
I'd hope that you'd come home, my child,
I'd hope that you'd come home.
You could knock upon my door;
I'd run to let you in.
I'd be so glad to see you
No matter where you'd been.
So glad, so glad to have you home,
So glad, so glad to have you home.
(Dunam 140-41)

The Clothing

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. (Luke 15:21-22)

Although the son started his prepared statement to his father, he did not get to finish it. He got through the repentance but not to the request. Before he made his request to be a hired servant, his father revealed that he was being restored as a son. The servants were sent to fetch three items of clothing: the best robe, a ring, and shoes. Each item represented the full restoration of the son. The robe was “a fine stately garment” that came “down to the feet.” It was “the kind worn by kings” (Butler 541). The ring bore the family emblem or name. It was pressed in wax to seal letters and legal documents. The sandals were

Continued on page 2

THE PRODIGAL SON: A YOUNG MAN WHO CAME TO HIMSELF & CAME HOME TO HIS FATHER (PART 2)

Continued from page 1

significant because servants did not wear sandals (543). The sandals were a clear indication that the prodigal son was not going to be a servant. Gire noted the following: "For the son's lost dignity, the father bestows on him a robe of honor. For his bare servant's feet, he puts on them the sandals of a son. For the hands that squandered an entire inheritance, he gives a signet ring that reinstates the son's position of authority in the family business" (Swindoll 129).

It is interesting to note that "everything the younger son had hoped to find in the far country, he discovered back home: clothes, jewelry, friends, joyful celebration, love, and assurance for the future" (Wiersbe, Bible 236). Can you imagine the shock that the prodigal son must have felt at the response of his father? Instead of receiving condemnation, he received compassion. Instead of a cold shoulder, he received a warm embrace. Instead of a slap, he received a kiss. Instead of being made a servant, he was reinstated as a son. The prodigal son received mercy and grace. He received mercy in that he did not get what he deserved condemnation. He received grace in that he got what he did not deserve - restoration.

The Celebration

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing (Luke 15:23-25).

As noted earlier in this study, a calf fattened for discretionary use was a sign of great wealth. In this parable, it may also be a sign of great hope. Although we are not told why the father had the calf in the stall, we are told how he used it. He used it to celebrate the homecoming of his son. Generally, fattened calves were kept for happy occasions like weddings. Although this was not a wedding, it was a happy occasion. What happier occasion could there have been than the resurrection or recovery of a son? Please note that the father spoke of his son as having been dead, but now alive again; and, as having been lost, but now found. Could it be that the father had the calf fattened for just such an occasion? It is possible; however, if so, then the father was hoping against hope. After all, the prodigal son had given him no reason to believe that he was ever coming home.

MacArthur noted that it was not uncommon in that day and time for a father to hold a funeral for a child who had acted as the prodigal son did (46). This was seen as a way for the father to preserve some of his honor. Personally, it is hard for me to imagine this father doing that. After all, when the prodigal son came home, he readily accepted him. There was no probationary period or reluctance to receive him. Furthermore, how others perceived him seemed to be the last thing on the father's mind.

It is interesting that loss goes up with each parable in Luke 15. It begins with 1 in 100 (Luke

15:4), then it is 1 in 10 (Luke 15:8), and finally, it is 1 in 2 (Luke 15:11). It begins with a lamb, then it is silver, and finally, it is a son (Griffith 241-43). Obviously, if the recovery of an animal and a coin were celebrated, and they were (Luke 15:5-6; Luke 15:9), then certainly the recovery of a son should be. After all, the son possessed an immortal soul worth more than all the world (Mat. 16:26).

I am convinced that we do not rejoice nearly enough when a prodigal comes home. We sing "O Happy Day" when someone is baptized, but nothing when someone is restored. Please do not misunderstand me. I think that we should rejoice when someone is baptized. I believe that there is Bible for that. However, it is also a happy day when someone is restored. We should sing then, too. There is also Bible for that. Read the fifteenth chapter of Luke and tell me that there is not (Luke 15:7; Luke 15:10). Sometimes, we act more like the elder brother than we realize. Although we do not refuse to come into the house (the church house), likely because we are already there, we do refuse to stay. We rush to eat, watch television, or take a nap instead of staying around to encourage the brother or sister who has responded. Is it any wonder that so many who respond fall back into sin? Although our reaction is not anger like the elder brother, it is equally despicable. Our emotion is indifference. We feel nothing at all. A greater contrast could not exist between heaven and earth. The angels in heaven are rejoicing (Luke 15:7; Luke 15:10), but the saints on earth are not responding at all. Can you imagine what the angels must be thinking as they look in on our reaction?

A Proud Brother

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is actually the Parable of the Prodigal Sons. It is the story of two sons, not one. It is the story of one son who rebelled outwardly and one who rebelled inwardly (Butler 547). For sure, through much of the parable, the elder brother appeared to be the good son. However, he was not. The later part of the parable reveals that he was every bit as rebellious as his younger brother. His sins just appeared more respectable than his brothers. We tend to judge promiscuity far more harshly than we judge pride. However, they were both equally despicable to God. Although the elder brother did not demand his inheritance like his brother, he had the same lack of respect for his father (Luke 15:29-30). Furthermore, he took his own trip to the far country although he went there mentally, rather than physically.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the prodigal son represented the publicans and sinners (Luke 15:1-2) and the elder brother represented the Pharisees. The sins of the publicans and sinners were much easier to see than the sins of the Pharisees. On the surface, the Pharisees appeared righteous. However, they were hypocrites or whited sepulchres (Mat. 23). It is easy to miss the fact that they, too, were in the far country. In fact, at the end of the parable, the prodigal son is safe and sound in the father's house. However, the elder

brother is still away. He is on the outside and probably is not even looking in. The parable ends with the father's invitation for him to come to the feast. However, all indications are that he did not do so. No doubt, many readers would have preferred for the parable to have ended on a happier note. They would have preferred for the parable to have ended with the return of the prodigal son (Butler 547). However, there was still a son in the far country that needed to come home. The father loved him every bit as much as he loved his other son. He was waiting to run to him also. However, it does not appear that He ever got the chance to do so. In this portion of the parable, we come to know the elder brother.

The Anger

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him (Luke 15:25-28).

On the surface, the elder brother again appeared to be the good son. After all, we see him coming from the fields. Once again, he has been plowing while his brother has been partying even though the partying this time was right (Luke 15:32), not riotous (Luke 15:13). While it is commendable that the elder brother had been in the field, it is not nearly as commendable as it at first seems. In fact, it may have been more self-serving than anything. After all, the *ponderosa* now belonged to him. When the father gave the prodigal his portion, he also gave the elder brother his (Luke 15:12). Everything that the father had was now the elder brother's (Luke 15:31). The one thing that we can be sure of is that the elder brother was not in the field out of love for his father. He resented having to serve and would soon tell his father so (Luke 15:29). Inrig noted that "the awful possibility is that we, too, can be in the Father's fields as servants, but not really in His house as sons or daughters" (26).

When the prodigal son heard the music and dancing, he inquired of one of the servants what the celebration was all about. Although the servant did not say anything about the robe, the ring, or the sandals, he did say enough to enrage the elder brother. It should be noted that the anger of the elder son seems to have been directed far more at his father than at his brother. Please do not misunderstand me. I know that the elder brother did not love his younger brother. In fact, I am convinced that he was more grieved at the news of the killing of the fatted calf than he would have been at the news of the death of his brother. The elder brother showed his anger by boycotting the banquet. The elder brother's actions remind me of Jonah. It is interesting that Jonah is both the

Continued on page 3

THE PRODIGAL SON: A YOUNG MAN WHO CAME TO HIMSELF & CAME HOME TO HIS FATHER (PART 2)

Continued from page 2

prodigal son and the elder brother, rolled into one. He is rebellious and tries to run away like the prodigal, and he is angry and unforgiving like the elder brother. As you recall, Jonah gets angry at God for pardoning Nineveh when she repents (Jon. 4:1-2). Furthermore, he sets up a booth on a hillside outside of the city (Jon. 4:5). He will not go in. Does this sound familiar? It should. After all, that is what the elder brother did. Wiersbe noted how strange it was that the elder brother could speak peaceably to a servant boy but not to his father or of his brother (Bible 237).

Also, please consider how Jonah showed far more grief over the death of the gourd vine than he did at the slated destruction of thousands in Nineveh (Jon. 4:6-11). Again, the elder brother seems to do the same with the fatted calf.

The elder brother's anger and failure to forgive hurt many people. First and foremost, it hurt him. After all, to be forgiven, we have to forgive (Mat. 6:12; Mat. 6:14-15); and to receive mercy, we have to show it (Jam. 2:13). Second, the elder brother's anger and failure to forgive hurt his father. The father loved both of his sons. He wanted to have both of them safe and sound under his roof. However, just as he got his youngest son home, the older son refused to come into the house. The father had to leave the celebration of the younger son's return to confront the elder brother's withdrawal. How often do elders and preachers have to do the same today? It is important to note that the father did not show preferential treatment either way. He went out to meet the elder son as he had gone out to meet the younger son. Although the elder son accused the father of favoring the younger son, it was not true. The words that the elder son said to his father must have cut the father as deeply as the words that the younger son had said to him at the beginning. Third, the elder brother hurt his younger brother. Although we are not told the reaction of the younger brother to his older brother's refusal to join the festivities, it is reasonable to conclude that it hurt him. The younger brother was trying to put the past behind him and the elder brother was determined not to let him do it. The elder brother is so angry that he will not even call the prodigal his brother. In speaking to his father, he simply refers to the prodigal as "thy son." Wiersbe noted that "everybody in the chapter experienced joy but the elder brother" (Bible 237).

Can you imagine what would have happened if the elder brother had met the prodigal son before he reached the father? (Hughes 145). Likely, he would have told him that he was not wanted. He would have quickly sent him back in the direction of the far country.

The Arrogance

And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment. (Luke 15:29)

It is interesting to consider how the elder brother saw the world. It is very telling. It clearly

shows his arrogance.

First, consider how the elder brother saw his father. The elder brother answered his father's plea for him to come into the feast with the word *Lo* or *look*. He could not have been more disrespectful or condescending. Can you not just hear the Pharisee in him? He clearly thought that he saw things more clearly than his father did. He was going to set his "old man" straight. He was going to be "a guide of the blind," "a light of them which are in darkness," and "an instructor of the foolish" (Rom. 2:19-20). He was going to teach his father a thing or two about how the world worked.

Second, consider how the elder brother saw the prodigal son. The elder brother did not even acknowledge the prodigal son as his brother. He told his father, "This thy son" (Luke 15:30) rather than "This my brother." It should be noted that the father did not let the elder brother's words go unchecked. He corrected him by declaring, "This thy brother" (Luke 15:32). Furthermore, please note that the elder brother cast his brother in the most negative light possible. He spoke of how the prodigal son had devoured his father's living with harlots. For sure, harlots were consistent with riotous living (Luke 15:13). However, we would not know this detail if it were not for the elder brother. Although the prodigal son had come home and confessed his sin, the elder brother had not forgiven him. We see in the elder brother's actions some of the callousness of Cain (Gen. 4:9) and some of the indifference of Joseph's brethren (Gen. 37:27).

Third, consider how the elder brother saw himself. The elder brother saw himself as a hired servant, rather than as an honored son. He spoke of the "many years" that he had served or slaved for his father. He clearly thought of his father as a "hard" master (Mat. 25:24). I find it amazing that the prodigal son came home requesting to be a hired servant while the elder brother was at home feeling like one all along. Not only did the elder brother see himself as a servant, he evidently saw himself as the perfect servant. After all, he claimed that he had not "transgressed" "at any time," his father's "commandments." Amazingly, at that very moment, he was disobeying his father's command to come to the feast. Wiersbe noted that the elder brother "openly announced the sins of his brother, but he could not see his own sins" (Bible 236). Perhaps, like another Pharisee in one of Luke's later parables, he thanked God that he was not like other men (Luke 18:9-14; cf. Mat. 7:1-4). Of course, in the parable before us, the elder brother was thanking God that he was not like his brother.

Likely, you recall that Jesus told another parable of two sons (Mat. 21:28-32). In fact, this other parable is usually called the Parable of the Two Sons. The two parables, The Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Parable of the Two Sons, are similar in several ways. First, both parables involve two sons. Second, both parables involve an openly rebellious son and an inwardly

rebellious son. Third, the openly rebellious son in both parables repents, while the inwardly rebellious son does not. Fourth, the sons in both parables represent the publicans/sinners and the Pharisees. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the defiant son who eventually repents represents the publicans and sinners, while the son who professes obedience, but does not give it, represents the Pharisees. Fifth, both parables end with the same message: publicans and sinners go into the kingdom before Pharisees. In the Parable of the Two Sons, this message is plainly stated. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it is plainly seen. The prodigal son is ultimately the son that did his father's will and not the elder brother. The prodigal son repented and came home, while the elder brother would not even acknowledge that he had done anything wrong (Luke 15:29).

The Accusation

...and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:29-32)

The elder brother accused his father of favoritism. He accused his father of giving things to his younger brother that he had never given to him, namely, a fatted calf and a party. However, such was not the case. The father had not shown favoritism. The elder brother received his inheritance at the same time that the younger brother received his. We read, "And he divided unto them his living" (Luke 15:12). Furthermore, according to the law, at the time of this division, the elder brother received a double portion of his father's goods. Everything that the father had was now his and had been since the prodigal son left. He could have killed a calf and have had a party anytime that he wanted to do so.

Furthermore, the elder brother misrepresented the banquet. He painted it as a party for the prodigal and his pals. However, it was not. It was not the prodigal who put the party together. It was the father. It was the father's party. Look at the two previous parables. It was the shepherd that invited his friends and neighbors to celebrate with him when he had found his sheep (Luke 15:6). It was the woman who called her friends and neighbors to celebrate with her when she had found her coin (Luke 15:9). The parallel is that it is the father who called his friends and his neighbors to celebrate with him when he found his son. It was not the prodigal's party, but the father's. It was meet or right for the father to do what he did. After all, the occasion called for it. The father would gladly have done the same for the elder brother, that is if he ever came home.

Continued on page 4

POWER

August, 2011
Volume Twenty-One, Number Eight



Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

POWER is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Southaven church of Christ, Southaven, Mississippi.



SUBSCRIPTION TERMS (USA):

Free Upon Request

Donations toward offsetting the cost of publishing POWER are gladly accepted and much appreciated.



Phone (662) 393-2690

FAX (662) 342-7152

E-mail: shavenpreacher@gmail.com

VISIT OUR WEB SITE:

www.southavencoc.org



SOUTHAVEN
CHURCH OF CHRIST

POWER

P.O. Box 128
SOUTHAVEN, MS 38671
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

THE PRODIGAL SON: A YOUNG MAN WHO CAME TO HIMSELF & CAME HOME TO HIS FATHER (PART 2)

Continued from page 3

Conclusion

As we close our discussion of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it is important for us to remember why Jesus told this parable, and the two that preceded it, in the first place. He told these parables because the Pharisees and scribes were murmuring over the fact that the publicans and sinners were welcomed by Jesus (Luke 15:1-2). They murmured because Jesus ate with publicans and sinners (Luke 15:2). Like the elder brother, the Pharisees and scribes ignored the fact that the publicans and sinners had come home confessing their sins and changing their ways. The parable was told to get the Pharisees, the elder brother, to come into the feast and to join the celebration.

-
1. Butler, John G. **Jesus Christ: His Parables**. Clinton, Iowa: LBC Publications, 2002, p. 508.
 1. McGee, J. Vernon. **Luke**. Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Books, 1986, p. 186
 1. Butler, 511.
 1. Butler, 512.
 1. MacArthur, John. **A Tale Of Two Sons**. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008, p. 47.
 1. MacArthur, 52.
 1. MacArthur, 48-49.
 1. MacArthur, p. 57.
 1. Dunam, Maxie. **Twelve Parables of Jesus**. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988, p. 135.
 1. MacArthur, p. 57.
 1. Inrig, Gary. **The Parables: Understanding What Jesus Meant**. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Discovery House Publishers, 1991, p. 17.
 1. MacArthur, p. 61.
 1. McGee, p. 179.
 1. MacArthur, p. 72.
 1. MacArthur, p. 71.
 1. MacArthur, p. 73.
 1. Inrig, p. 17-18.
 1. Inrig, p. 19.
 1. Inrig, p. 19.
 1. Inrig, p. 13.
 1. Wiersbe, Warren. **Classic Sermons On The Prodigal Son**. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1990, p. 34. (Only usage).
 1. Dunam, p. 139.
 1. Wiersbe, Classic, p. 46.
 1. Wiersbe, Warren W. **The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, Volume 1**. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Victor, 2001, p. 236.
 1. Wiersbe, Classic, 145.
 1. Butler, 540-541.
 1. Dunam, 140-141.
 1. Butler, 541.
 1. Butler, 541.
 1. Butler, 543.
 1. Swindoll, Charles. **The Declaration Of Something Mysterious**. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995, p. 129.
 1. Wiersbe, p. 236.
 1. MacArthur, p. 46.
 1. Thomas, W. H. Griffith. **Outline Studies in Luke**. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1984, p. 241-243.
 1. Butler, 547.
 1. Butler, 547.
 1. Inrig, 26.
 1. Wiersbe, p. 237.
 1. Wiersbe, 237.
 1. Hughes, R. Kent. **Luke: That They May Know The Truth**. Volume 2. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998, p. 145.
 1. Wiersbe, p. 236.

Non-Profit
Organization
U. S. Postage
PAID
Southaven, MS
Permit No. 24
