

Fil-Am Community Church  
Pastor David Bennett  
20 October 2013  
Key Verses: Luke 15:25-32

## **“THE PRODIGAL BROTHER”**

Good morning Fil-Am today we are still continuing in the series called heroes of the Bible. However, this morning the topic does not seem to fit, so I need to do a little explaining.

First let me start by thanking Pastor Rolly who decided to let me explore outside of the original boundaries set for Heroes of the Bible. I was going to do a sermon on the prodigal son as the hero or even thought about the possibility of the faithful father as the hero, but the more and more I started doing research and reading over the parable again and again, it dawned on me there is another aspect of the story that I think many of us relate to even more than the son or the father and that is the prodigal brother, the one who faithfully remained behind.

So I asked Pastor if he would let me get outside of the typical hero and concentrate on what I think the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us through his brother...

With all that being said, let's get into the word of God, or more importantly, let's get the word of God into us...

This morning we will turn our attention to the most famous of our Lord's parables. This extended parable in Luke 15 is intended to teach the truth that God loves sinners. He loves the lost enough to go after them in their lost condition, as evidenced by all three illustrations in this chapter.

He loves the self-righteous sinner enough to tell them about their condition, which is why He told this parable to begin with.

Very often, when this chapter is preached, you hear about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son, but it is a rare day when you hear anything about the elder brother. The one that stayed behind.

Why is that? I think we avoid this story because our focus is on the emotional reunion between the father and the prodigal son.

I also think we avoid this section because it hits a little too close to home! There is at least a little, and maybe a lot, of the elder brother in nearly each of us. And for that reason alone, is why we will put our focus on the brother.

Some preachers were discussing the Bible one day when the subject of the elder brother to the prodigal son as well as his identity came up. They were trying to figure out who he was.

- ✓ One older preacher spoke up and said, *“I know who he is. In fact, I saw him just today.”*
- ✓ The other ministers, eager to hear his response asked, *“Who is he?”*
- ✓ The wise old preacher said simply, *“He is me!”*

Saints if you are honest with yourself and pay attention to the sermon today, I think you will find that we have more in common with him rather than his more famous brother.

As the Lord Jesus reaches the end of this parable, He is still talking about lost things. He is still dealing with the attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees toward lost sinners, v. 1-2.

*<sup>1</sup>Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. <sup>2</sup>Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

The elder brother in this text pictures a person who is involved in the things of God, but who has no real relationship with God, or he does but seems to have lost his way.

He is in the father’s house, but he is lost. He is in the *“far country”* in his heart!

Have you ever sat at a table with someone and see that they have emotionally checked out, they are with you in person only, because their mind is elsewhere, or it could be you in a crowded room, or at a New Year’s Eve party and yet you feel so alone?

Am I talking to anyone today?

Just think about that statement for a minute, there are people that go to church every Sunday and yet are still lost, it takes a lot more than just showing up to be counted as Christians.

Continuing on this morning verse 11 reminds us that this father had “two sons,” and both were lost.

I know you are thinking how could he say they were both lost, if you will just bear with me a moment I will explain.

- ✓ The younger son was lost in “*the far country.*”
- ✓ The elder brother was lost in the father’s house.
- ✓ The younger son was a lost hedonist; he lived for pleasure.
- ✓ The elder brother was a lost moralist; he lived to maintain appearances.

There are two ways you can be lost.

- ✓ One way is to break the rules and do as you please. This is how the younger brother lived, and he was lost.
- ✓ The other way, is to keep all the rules and to be good. This is how the elder brother lived, and he was lost too, in a different way that we will get into shortly.

We don’t get this because we equate being good with being saved. But, if you are only being good to earn favor with God, you are lost!

If you keep the rules so that God will have to hear your prayers and bless you, you have missed the point. The Gospel is not being good and you will be saved; the Gospel is be saved, and you will be good.

One does come before the other and not the other way around!

*This message is designed to speak to two classes of people.*

- ✓ The primary message is to those who are lost in sin and need to be saved. You might be religious, you might be a church member, you

might be a good, moral person, but you have never been saved. God has a word for you today.

- ✓ This message also has a word for people who think they are saved by association, but who have the same spirit an attitude as the elder brother.
- ✓ It speaks to people who are upset when God blesses His people.
- ✓ It speaks to people who do not like it when the prodigal sons come home.
- ✓ It speaks to people who refuse to rejoice over what God is doing because it isn't being done their way.
- ✓ Am I speaking to anyone at all today?
- ✓ It speaks to people who are like the elder brother.

So this morning we are going to talk about *The Prodigal Brother*.

It may just be that the Lord will pinpoint a problem area in your life. If He does, please obey His voice and deal with whatever issues He exposes.

For the next while, let's listen to what the Lord has to say in these verses about *The Prodigal Brother*. There are some *lessons* here that we do not need to miss.

## I. His Respectability vs. 25

<sup>25</sup> *"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.*

### a. He was a Leader

He is the elder brother. As such, he is entitled to two-thirds of His father's possessions, Deut. 21:17.

<sup>17</sup> But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn.

Since his younger brother has already received his part of the inheritance, v. 12, everything belongs to this brother.

<sup>12</sup> *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.*

When his father dies, not only will he receive his father's possessions, he will also become the legal and religious head of the family. Much has been given to this young man already and more is on the way. He has been blessed indeed!

### **b. He Was A Laborer**

When we first meet this man, he is "*in the fields*". He is busy doing his father's business. While his younger brother has been off in the far country living it up, this young man has stayed home and worked.

He has been working hard. It seems that all is well in this family, and that there is good fellowship between the father and this older boy.

The elder brother is a picture of the religious elite. They were also in a place of privilege. They had God's Law and it appeared, outwardly at least, that they were walking in the Law!

They looked good to others, but there was a real problem in their hearts! The problem was hidden from human view, but God could see it.

They were religious, but they were lost! Saints it is not about a religion, its about a relationship!

They were just going through the motions.

The same thing could be true of some here!

- ✓ We are moral people.
- ✓ We come to church.

- ✓ We don't purposely steal or cheat.
- ✓ We have been baptized
- ✓ And many even belong to the church.
- ✓ They may have even completed 101-401 classes.

By all appearances, we are as good, or better, than anyone around us.

The Lord knows our true condition. You can fool others, but you can't fool Him... 1 Sam. 16:7.

*<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

You can be good, moral and active in church and still be lost. Jesus said so in Matt. 7:21-23.

*<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'*

We talked about this topic last week in **IMPACT** class with Miss Laura.

You might think you are right with God, but you can't trust what you "feel in your heart". The heart is wicked and deceitful, only God truly knows our hearts, Jer. 17:9-10!

*<sup>9</sup> "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? <sup>10</sup> "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds*

I am not trying to make anyone doubt their salvation. However it is my job to make sure you are **aware** of that salvation!

- ✓ I am simply saying that religion does not equal salvation.

- ✓ Church membership does not equal conversion.
- ✓ Being close to the things of God does not equal being saved by the grace of God.

Being in a church does not make you a Christian any more than sleeping in a garage makes you a car.

You must not depend on who you are or what you have done for your salvation. You must be born again.

Salvation is by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9 Amplified Bible

*<sup>8</sup> For it is by free grace (God's unmerited favor) that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation) through [your] faith. And this [salvation] is not of yourselves [of your own doing, it came not through your own striving], but it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> Not because of works [not the fulfillment of the Law's demands], lest any man should boast. [It is not the result of what anyone can possibly do, so no one can pride himself in it or take glory to himself.]*

Are you saved?

I don't need you to answer that question right now but it is a question that you need to definitely know, as your very life depends upon its answer!

The first point this morning was his Respectability, which leads us to the second point...

## **II. His Resentment vs. 25-30.**

Arthur Lenehan, in the booklet, Soundings, told a story about a type of jellyfish whose home is the Bay of Naples, Italy. The jellyfish is called medusa.

In the Bay, too, are snails of the nudibranch variety. When these snails are little, a jellyfish may swallow one of them. The jellyfish draws the snail into its digestive tract. However, the snail is protected by its shell.

The jellyfish can't digest it. The snail fastens itself to the inside of the jellyfish and slowly begins to eat it. When the snail grows to maturity, it has consumed the entire jellyfish.

Often, the "snails" we swallow consume us! Alcoholism can be a snail. The Chinese say,

- ✓ First, the man takes a drink.
- ✓ Then, the drink takes a drink.
- ✓ Then, the drink takes a man.

The desire for a drink can get a hold on us. It begins to grow and gnaw at us. After a while, we are consumed by the need for a drink.

Hate can be a snail. We nurse the resentment. We grow to hate. The hatred gets a hold on us. After a while, we are consumed by the hatred.

This is the type resentment that the older brother had; it ate him up and kept him from walking in his blessings.

Getting back to the story...

Heading home after a hard day in the fields, this brother hears the sounds of celebrating as he nears the house. He is confused, as far as he knows; there is no reason for celebration at the father's house. He's lived there all his life and he has never seen a reason for celebration.

He calls a servant, the text suggests it was a young boy, and asks the meaning of all the noise. The servant tells him of his lost brother's return and about the father killing the fatted calf and throwing a party.

When he hears this, he becomes "*angry.*" The word means "*to become red-faced.*" It speaks of a person clenching their fists, and becoming red with anger. In his actions here, his resentment toward the father and His brother can be clearly seen.

You can start to see the resentment in the older brother, he doesn't show



any love for his younger brother or even act as if he was happy he had returned.

As the older brother, it was his responsibility to go after his missing sibling. He didn't go. The text suggests that he didn't even show up to say goodbye. His actions indicate that he didn't care what happened to his younger boy.

He didn't care that his younger brother had come home. This man had already written off his younger brother and didn't care what happened to him.

You could step out on a limb and say that there was also not a lot of love between him and the father either...

- ✓ He was disrespectful to the father.
- ✓ He was resentful of the father's open love for the younger son.
- ✓ He was self-serving, hateful and condescending.
- ✓ He might have been living at home and laboring for the father, but he did not love the old man, or at least didn't seem to.

#### **a. His Resentment Is Seen In His Motives...**

When this brother hears why there is a celebration, he is angry and refuses to go in.

His father comes out and gently pleads with him to come in. His reply to his father is very telling of this boy's heart. In verse 29, he reminds the father of his faithful service and complains that he has never been given a feast for what he has done.

*<sup>29</sup> 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;*

The bottom line here is this:

- ✓ He did not care that his lost brother had come home.
- ✓ He did not care about that which pleased the father.

The elder brother would have known that the day of the prodigal's return was the greatest day in his father's life.

- ✓ The father has "*killed the fatted calf*", an enormously expensive extravagance in a culture where even having meat at meals was considered a delicacy.
- ✓ The older son realized his father was ecstatic with joy. Yet he refused to go into the biggest feast his father has ever put on. This was a remarkable, deliberate act of disrespect. It was his way of saying, "*I won't be part of this family nor respect your headship of it.*"
- ✓ And the father had to "*go out*" to plead with him. Just as he went out to bring his alienated younger son into the family, now he had to do the same for the older brother.
- ✓ He did not even care about the father. Evidently, he did what he did for what he could get out of it.
- ✓ He saw his service to the father as "*slavery*," not as part of a family.
- ✓ He is saying, "*All these years I have been in bondage to you!*" He didn't serve his father out of love for the father, but out of a desire to help himself.

This same attitude can be seen in the church, not this church but other churches!

- ✓ Some won't rejoice when sinners are saved, because they feel threatened.
- ✓ They cannot get excited when a church grows, because they see their hold on power slipping away.
- ✓ They do not care about God's will being done in the church; if it runs counter to their personal agenda.
- ✓ They want the all accolades, all the pats on the backs and all the glory.

- ✓ Their service in the church is not about God, it is about them!
- ✓ Some people go through the motions of serving the Lord for what they think they will gain from it.
- ✓ You can almost hear them say, what about me?
- ✓ I help set up and tear down every Sunday
- ✓ I sing in the choir, I help with Sunday school
- ✓ Or I attend **IMPACT** class and have been through 101-401 classes

That's the question, isn't it? "What about me?"

Don't tell me you've never asked this question or at least thought it, because at one time or another we all do.

Let's be honest: The elder brother is the one in the story with whom we identify most. The scribes and Pharisees saw themselves as well as similarly, we don't much like what we see.

When you see this kind of attitude on display, either you have a lost person masquerading as a saved person, or you have someone who is out of God's will!

#### **b. His Resentment Is Seen In His Mentality**

When you listen to this boy talk to the father, you quickly realize that he is

- ✓ proud,
- ✓ disrespectful,
- ✓ arrogant, and,
- ✓ angry

There is obviously something wrong with his attitude about this situation.

- ✓ He should be overjoyed! His brother has returned safely from the far country.
- ✓ He should be rejoicing that the father has received a lost son home again.
- ✓ All he can do is whine, pout and complain.

Do you want to know what his real problem is? Look at his response in Luke 15:30.

*<sup>30</sup> but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'*

Who told him this boy had spent his money on prostitutes? If you notice he hasn't talked to the father or to his brother, remember he was in the field working.

Do you know what's wrong with him?

He's jealous!

He may be at home in body, but he is in the far country in his heart!

He is as far away from the father as was the other son when he went away. All he really wants to do is live it up like his brother! He won't go and do it, because his pride won't let him. So he gets mad that one who did the very things he wants to do in his heart has been received by the father.

This is what was wrong with the Pharisees. They kept the letter of the Law outwardly, but in their hearts, they lusted, they hated, and they longed for sin!

- ✓ You don't have to be a drunk to be out of God's will!
- ✓ You don't have to be an adulterer to be in the far country spiritually.
- ✓ You can serve your church, sing in the choir, preach the Word or anything else you want to name and still be out of God's will!
- ✓ You may look as good as anyone today, but you can have a heart that is filled with lust, evil thoughts, desires for sin, etc.

Do you see it? You can pretend to be anything you wish outwardly, but it is the condition of the heart that matters to God, he sees on the inside.

When you get saved, the Lord gives you a new heart.

That gives you the ability to live a new life. It is even possible for people with new hearts to be full of sin and evil. What is the solution?

1 John 1:9...

*<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Another problem this man had was due to the father's use of his wealth. In verse 12 we are told that the father "*divided to them his living.*" Everything the father has already belongs to the elder brother, v. 31.

It will all fall into his hands when the father dies. He is mad because the father dared use wealth that was to come to him to throw a feast for this despised brother.

### **c. His Resentment Is Seen In His Methods**

The elder brother did two things here that indicate that he as resentful toward the father, as much as toward his younger brother.

First, it was a sign of disrespect to fail to greet ones father with a proper title. Even the younger brother did this, v. 12.

Second, it was also disrespectful for a young man to argue with his father. This boy did just that in front of the servants and the guests. He brought as much, or maybe more, disgrace upon the father as the other son, because he did what he did in public.

Notice how this young man handled his anger.

- ✓ He attacked,
- ✓ He criticized and
- ✓ He blamed!

This lets you know that his heart is not right! Why? The outward attitudes and actions are a mirror into the heart. Listen to what Paul says about this in Galatians 5:19-23

<sup>19</sup> Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

## What does your heart say about you?

I told you, this hits close to home, the word is eating some of us up today!

The first point was his Respectability, the second point was his Resentment, the third point is his...

### III. His Reaction vs. 28, 31-32.

#### a. He Refused The Father's Plea

The father went out and “*entreated*” this boy to come in to the feast. The word “*entreat*” means “*to come alongside of another to offer aid and comfort, to beg, to console, to comfort, to encourage.*”

It is the same word that is translated “*Comforter*” in John 16:13 and is one of the names of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>13</sup> But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

This father loved him, and came outside to encourage this man to come to the feast, to celebrate the return of his lost brother.

Notice that this son won't even call him “*father*”, but the father calls him “*son*”. This father went to this boy in the right spirit, but he was rejected!

There are times when the Lord speaks to us as well.

If we are saved...

- ✓ He will speak to us to encourage us,
- ✓ Or to confront the sin that is in our lives.

If we are saved...

- ✓ He speaks to us and calls us to repent of our sins,
- ✓ To come to Jesus, and to be saved.

## **Is He speaking to you today?**

If He is, please do not refuse His voice. Do what He is pleading with you to do.

### **b. He Refused The Father's Promises**

The father praised him for his efforts, and reminded him that everything was already his! In effect, this father was saying, *"I value you and our relationship far more than I value your works."*

This boy could have enjoyed fellowship with the father anytime he wanted, but apparently, he was too wrapped up in his own legalism and narrow-mindedness to realize it.

This boy wanted what the father had, but he did not want the father, just like his younger brother, v. 12.

Even though he didn't want the father, he did not want anyone else to have the father either, that's the tragedy.

Here is poem we studied in the Woodbridge Home Group, last year in one of Max Lacado's studies called \$3 Dollars' worth of Jesus by Wilbur Rees:

"I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please - not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of him to make

me love a foreigner or pick beets with a migrant worker. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of a womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I'd like to buy \$3 worth of God, Please."

The same thing is true in many lives today!

- ✓ People want the church.
- ✓ They want to feel better about themselves.
- ✓ They want a fire insurance policy.
- ✓ They want the get out of hell free card.

But, they don't really want an intimate relationship with the Father. Often, they resent those who do want that closeness. I just want to remind you that you are as close to the Lord as you want to be! You have as much fellowship with Him as you want to have. You can have more, if you want it. Do you?

### **c. He Refused The Father's Passion**

The father tells this boy that is was "*necessary*" that they should have this celebration. To the father, the return of the lost son was a cause for celebration.

The Father was passionate about the younger son's return. A lost one had been found. One considered dead was now alive again. And, perhaps most importantly, a father's love and faith had been vindicated and the family name restored.

There was much cause for rejoicing. The father wants this boy to learn the truth that everything isn't about him and about him getting his own way. There are bigger issues at stake and they should take priority!

This is how things are in the work of God as well. Nothing is more important than the glory of God.

Instead of getting upset when God doesn't do things our way, we should learn to thank Him for what He is doing!



Instead of pouting, this boy could have been enjoying the party! And, so could we!

Look at this parable again. *Everyone is happy but the elder brother.*

- ✓ The shepherd is happy.
- ✓ His friends are happy.
- ✓ The woman is happy.
- ✓ Her friends are happy.
- ✓ The father is happy.
- ✓ The lost son is happy.
- ✓ The servants are happy.
- ✓ The residents of Heaven are happy.

The only person who is miserable here is the elder brother.

He is miserable because he refuses to be happy. The feast is there, all he has to do is go in and enjoy himself! Instead, he is standing out there pouting, because he is not the center of attention, and because he didn't get his way! What a shame!

Have you ever noticed that this is an open-ended story?

Did the elder brother ever come into the feast? We don't know! I think Jesus left it this way for a reason. And here is that reason: *Every individual must write his or her own ending to this story!*

For Israel, the story ended badly. The Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself to the nation as their long awaited Messiah. He came to them as the fulfillment of all the ancient prophecies. They knew Who He claimed to be, but they refused to receive Him as their Messiah, as their Lord, or as their Savior.

In this story, the elder brother represents the religious leaders of Israel. They refused to come to the feast, and in the end, they killed the father. They murdered Him because they would not have Him rule over them.

How will this story end for you?

- ✓ If you are lost today, you need to come to Jesus Christ for salvation

today.

- ✓ If you are saved, but not where you need to be, you should get things right today. There is a party going on, and you are invited.
- ✓ Don't stay outside listening to be celebration.
- ✓ Come in and be a part of it.

If the Lord has spoken to your heart about salvation or about your personal walk with Him, please come today while He is calling. The whole point of this extended parable has been to show the importance of the human soul to God and to point lost people to a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

**What is preventing you from coming today?**