**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #41**

**The Prodigal Son**

**Luke 15:11-32**

**Class dinner May 4**

Friends – Our end-of-class carry-in dinner is next Wednesday, May 4, in the E91 Friendship Room (where we had our Christmas dinner). We have sign-up and dish-to-bring sheets in class, or contact me at [rlwcom@aol.com](mailto:rlwcom@aol.com) / 317-694-4141. All current and past class members and friends are welcome. See you there!

- Bob

*PS – Tonight will be George’s final class before summer break.*

**Luke 15:11-32 – The Lost Son / Prodigal Son**

[***11***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-11.htm) *And he said, “There was a man who had two sons.* [***12***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-12.htm) *And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of property that is coming to me.’ So he divided his property between them.*

[***13***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-13.htm) *“Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.* [***14***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-14.htm) *And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that land, and he began to be in need.* [***15***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-15.htm) *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that land, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.* ***16*** *And he was longing to be fed with the carob pods on which the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*

[***17***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-17.htm) *“Finally when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!* [***18***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-18.htm) *I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.* [***19***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-19.htm)*I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’”* [***20***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-20.htm) *And he arose and came to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*

[***21***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-21.htm) *“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

***22*** *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.* [***23***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-23.htm) *And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.* [***24***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-24.htm) *For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.*

[***25***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-25.htm) *“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.* [***26***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-26.htm) *And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.* [***27***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-27.htm) *And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’*

[***28***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-28.htm) *“But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,* ***29*** *but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.* [***30***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-30.htm) *But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’*

[***31***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-31.htm) *“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.* [***32***](http://biblehub.com/luke/15-32.htm) *It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”*

**Notes and Studies**

1. This parable has received many, many comments since the early days of the church. It has all the best of all that can be called real life:

- Responsibility

- Estrangement

- Longing for the lost

- Anguish

- Reconciliation

- All the universal characteristics of our life

1. “*A man who had two sons,*” no further details of the young one, married or unmarried is not part of the story.
2. *“‘Father, give me the portion of property that is coming to me.”* Here we have the rare use of the Greek word ***ousia*** that is “substance” or “the portion that.” According to the Jewish customs, not according to the strict Law the father could dispose of his property by a will or by a gift to his children. But the First born son was to inherit a “double portion” (Deut 21:17. No wonder Jacob was so anxious to get the birthright from his brother Esau Genesis 25:2)
3. Dividing the estate or rather “his living,” the Greek word ***bios*** means all the father actually has: land and the rest.
4. The father could have refused to give any share, but out of his goodness he yielded.
5. The son left home to a distant land; maybe he went outside Judea. There he squandered his property in a way of living unwisely.

**The Crisis**

1. What was converted to money did not last and a famine drove him to become a “hired hand.”
2. More than that, he became a “swineherd,” and pigs were and still regarded as “unclean” (Lev 11:17, Deut 14:8). Pigs do not chew the cud like cows or sheep.
3. And even more than that, he longed to have his fill from “carob pods” which grow on trees all over the Mediterranean. It is called “St John’s Bread.” The pods contain sweet pulp and hard black seeds indigestible to humans; animals eat it for food



Carob Pod Tree

4. This was not enough diet for everyday nourishment and no one offered him any other kind of food.

***“He came to himself”***

1. This means “to his senses” and to a realization of what he was and what he is now. This was misunderstood as “repentance” but it this is not correct for Peter came back to his senses or “back to himself” when he was freed by the angel of the Lord from prison (Acts 12:11) so it is the awakening rather than repentance.
2. I shall go back home.

**Confession**

1. “*I have sinned against heaven and before you…*” It was only in the son’s heart, for when his father embraced him the confession was shorter as the last words reveal,  *“Treat me as one of your hired servants.”* Here the intention is more important than the words themselves. The parable does not allow us to think of a detailed confession but just an expression of the intention.
2. More importantly, there is no condition or a change of the status as the result of confession. This parable condemns the later practice of “penance” that became well known in the Middle ages especially in the West

**Who is the father?**

1. Many scholars identified the father as God the Father. Dr. K Baily and others rightly saw the father’s action as that of Jesus himself. Dr. Baily’s argument is that this parable is part of one unit which includes the lost sheep and the lost coin. Also at the very beginning of chapter 15, we are told that Jesus was answering his critics, “*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”* (Luke 15:1-2).
2. Again the father ran to meet the son who alienated himself, but still in spite of his great sin as his son. It is highly dangerous to extend any parable to include later development or later conflicts such as Church / Synagogue relationship. The Son was not a “gentile” and he can’t be representative of the gentiles. The Parable deals only with the Critics of Jesus and it was part of the difficult ministry Jesus had among the Jews.
3. It is also hard to see and to share with Dr. Bailey, himself a great scholar of the parables, that the older son is Jacob, a theme which was expanded in his book, “The Prodigal and Jacob.” The true Founders of the Early Church were Jews according to all the books of the NT. Not every Jacob that is a Jews refused Jesus, but some did and some rejected.
4. It is also hard to accept the Later Jewish attack on the NT itself under the new title: Replacement Theology, which just says that the sin of the church is that it has replaced the Synagogue and that has generated the Anti-Semitism. The Parable as we see was a lesson for a restoration of a family and a call to those who think that they are “Righteous” to accept the “Broken” and the “Prodigal.”

**Where does the Parable hit?**

1. This parable hits all forms and contents of “legalisms.” The Prodigal son lost his right to come back home and to be a member of his family. This is clear as Jesus was addressing those who were grumbling that he eats with tax collectors and sinners. The name “sinner” is reserved for those who don’t keep the Law. Here Jesus accepts to be their friend.

2. The Gospel of Luke provides us with a picture of Jesus as a friend of sinners. In Mark, there is the account in which Jesus calls the tax collector Levi and thereafter shares a meal with Levi and many toll collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17). Both Luke and Matthew repeat it with small changes (Luke 5:27-32; Matthew 9:9-13). In addition, Jesus was a “*glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners*” (Luke 7:31-34; Matthew 11:16-19). Apart from these, there are only two passages in all of Matthew, Mark and John which contribute to the picture of Jesus as the special friend of people who were thought sinful in some special and concrete sense. The first is Matthew 21:31-32, in which Jesus says that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the Kingdom of God before the high priests and elders of his day (addressed in 21:23) because they believed John the Baptist. In this saying, Jesus sets tax collectors and prostitutes up as an example of the right kind of faith, but John, not Jesus, is the one who reportedly impressed these groups. The second is the story of the adulteress in John 7:53-8:11. Jesus refused to stone her.

3. Jesus himself was on friendly terms with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17; Matthew 9:9-13 and Matthew 11:19). For Luke, this is extremely significant. In Luke’s 15th chapter, Jesus tells the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son to defend his meals with toll collectors and sinners in the face of the Pharisees and the scribes. In Luke 18:9-14, Luke has Jesus tell the parable of the Pharisee and Tax collector in the Temple. In Luke 19:1-10 Jesus met Zaccheus, the chief Tax collector. Finally, Jesus has a gracious exchange of words with one of the criminals crucified with him and promises that he will be with him in Paradise (23:43)

4. In the Gospel of Luke, then, Jesus’ relationship to tax collectors and sinners is developed and enriched. Luke’s presentation of the theme has left the deepest imprint on how Jesus has been seen by Christians; it permeates Christian hymns and teachings.

The Gospel of Luke has given us this collection of images of Jesus as the defender of inner.

**The Lord who loves us as sinners**

**A Letter from Philemon**

Brother George,

The Lord who loves us as sinners, he gives us love that generates hope in his acceptance of all of all of us. I understand your painful reaction to the critical approach of your teachers to the Holy Scriptures. I have warned you early that you can’t be both a judge and a disciple; you have to be one but not two at the same time. A judge stands away to judge and to see whether the teaching is good and true. A judge does not commit his life to the teaching because he is a judge, while a disciple listens and commits the totality of his life in love to the master. The disciple will seek truth in the fellowship and from his love will learn what truth is. The two that are the judge and the disciple can’t meet.

Here is what I think of why Jesus had a special love for sinners. First of all he lived our human life and in this human life he learned that we all are subjected to temptations. Our real struggle is with “mortality” which is the cause of all sins, for the holy Paul told us that “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” (1 Cor 15:56) This sting is that which drives us to be other than what we are. Jesus’s main teaching aims at uncovering this “sting” that drives us to sin.

Jesus told us to die to ourselves and to live to God; no one who loves his enemies is under the power of morality. Love and mortality can’t be reconciled. So, my beloved brother, those who are judges of the Lord are those whose love must be examined. If we love the Lord, we have mercy and compassion on all sinners, because the love of Jesus has this quality in it, for this love tell us that we are not perfect and that we all need mercy.

May the Lord Jesus be always your teacher and you be always his disciple.

Philemon

June 3, 1966

***Pope’s Notes***

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