

TEACHING THEME 2010

LUKE 15:11-32 Parable of the Prodigal son.

CONTEXT:

V2 Jesus is eating with sinners and tax collectors. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were muttering. These are the people Jesus is talking to.

THIS PARABLE IS ABOUT ALL OF US:

We have inherited untold blessings from our Father in heaven. Forgiveness, gift of eternal life, the Holy Spirit, a relationship with God living in us, fellowship in the family of God, the Body of Christ.

We are now children of God, our names written in the Book of Life. We have inherited all this and more. God expects us to take the talents and all these blessings he has given us and to use them wisely. Perhaps in the story this is what the father was expecting the son to do. Like the son, so often we squander the gifts of God. We backslide into sin. Sometimes we slide so far from God we end up wallowing in shame.

WHAT DOES THE PARABLE TEACH US?

• The love of God is unconditional.

The love of the father knew no bounds. He saw his son still a long way off and ran to welcome him. He embraces and kisses him. He throws him a party. The son was lost and is found. He has returned. God's love towards us is everlasting, unconditional. No matter how far we backslide or slip into sin he still loves us and will always welcome us back with open arms when we are ready to return to him.

• The folly of sin.

We choose to go out into the world and to wander away from God and pursue pleasures and desires that are not Godly. This is the most stupid irrational thing we as Christians can do, yet we do it all the time. Most of us have a story to tell. Sometimes it is even too shameful to tell.

We chase after money, power, fame, influence, sex, self indulgence, drugs, gambling, smoking. You name it we chase after it.

Forces outside his control seemed to conspire against the son to bring him to his senses. A famine in the land. Feeding pigs. Starving.

THE MAIN THEME OF THE PARABLE:

We who are Christians, from time to time all slip back into sinfulness. Even when we do God will always welcome us back when we turn to him. He welcomes us back with open arms throws us a party and once again we dance with joy.

With this in mind our Teaching Theme for the year is:

MEANING OF THE PARABLE:

The father loved both sons equally. No matter what their circumstances. God loves us all the same. It does not matter if you have a high profile job in the church, or if you are deemed to be more important than others.

The older brother worked hard and was obedient to the father. All these years I have been slaving for you. We can sometimes have a similar attitude. We obey God, work hard to serve the church, make sacrifices serve others, go out of our way, pray regularly, give tithes and offerings. It can seem like we've been 'slaving' for years.

Like the older brother we lose sight of what God has done for us. God says, "All I have is yours!" Inside though we can be feeling resentment, anger, jealousy, unappreciated. Sometimes we may feel like we are very Godly until we are faced with a crisis, or with circumstances that 'test your metal'. They expose what you are really like inside. This may be God's way of helping us grow.

God hated the sin that surfaced in both brothers. Although the elder felt more 'righteous' in reality he was no better than the younger.

PARABLE DESCRIPTION:

The younger son of a wealthy farmer asks for his inheritance ahead of time. The father agrees and divides up his estate between his two sons. The younger squanders his money on wild living. It soon runs out. Finds himself starving in a foreign country. Finds a job feeding the pigs. For a Jew this must have been the ultimate disgrace and humiliation. Eventually he comes to his senses and decides to return home. Repentant, he intends to ask his father to hire him as one of his servants. I have sinned against God and you, hire me as one of your servants.

Instead the father welcomes the lost son home. Puts a ring on his finger, sandals on his feet and a robe. Kills the fatted calf and throws a party in his son's honour.

The older brother becomes angry when the father throws a party for the wayward son. He refuses to join in the celebrations. The father comes out to plead with him. His reaction, "All these years I've been slaving for you."

"My son everything I have is your's, this brother was dead and is alive, was lost and is now found."

This part of the parable Jesus aims at the Pharisees. They were acting like the jealous brother. Not willing to forgive sinners and resenting the love of the Father.

Jeremiah 31:3-4

3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:
"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."
4 I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.

INTERPRETATION OF THE THEME:

If we are 'DANCING WITH GOD' we will strike the right balance. Not following the path of either brother but rather following Jesus. We are told by Luke that Jesus grew in **wisdom, stature and favour with God and men.**

Luke 2:51-52 (NIV)

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

In our "DANCING WITH GOD" theme we will explore what it means to be doing this as opposed to what both sons did in the story. We will aim for truth. To strike the right balance. To learn to be obedient to God, not to fall into sin and not to be self-righteous. We will explore subjects that will help us to be in step with God as we 'dance' with Him.

