

Prodigal Grace
Luke 15:11-32

Introduction

This is a familiar story to many about a rebellious son who leaves his father, sins in a big way, and then comes home. Often we think that the main character is the younger son, the rebellious son, the prodigal son. But this morning, I want to look at this story and see the central character as the prodigal Father. "Prodigal" doesn't mean lost or rebellious. It means "recklessly extravagant, spending freely to the point of recklessness." Yes, this does describe the younger son when he wastes all his inheritance, but the Father also is extravagant in how he treats both his sons. As we work through this story, I want to focus on the contrast between what the two sons deserve (or think they deserve) and the prodigal grace, the extravagant generosity the Father gives.

The Prodigal Father and the Younger Son

The parable begins with a father and his two sons. The younger son demands that his father give him the share of property that is coming to him (vs 12). This is blatant disrespect, but also a bold demand, "Give me what I deserve." The son scoops up all his inheritance, abandons his father and squanders all his wealth. A severe famine hits and he has to feed pigs to stay alive (vs 16). He's been given so much and now he's given everything up--his culture, his religion, his wealth, his father. In desperation, the son decides to return to his father confessing his sins and his unworthiness to be a son (vs 18-19). He deserves to be treated as a servant. We first see prodigal grace with the father standing on tip toes, looking down the road for his son to come home. The humbled son arrives empty handed, and the father fills him up with gifts and covers him with grace. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found" (vs. 24) and the BBQ gets fired up.

The Prodigal Father and the Older Son

Everyone is at the party, except the older brother (vs 25). He's in the field working, outside the celebration. The father goes out to his older son to invite him to join the party. This brother is angry about his father's extravagant welcome for the undeserving son. He was counting on his actions, his work, his good deeds to earn his father's approval. His arms are so full of his own good works that he can't receive the gifts from his father.

The Prodigal Father and the Other Son

In this story, God is the Father, and we are the sons. How could God the Father accept a rebellious and shameful son and a cranky and legalistic son into his celebration? It's because the Father had another son named Jesus. Unlike both sons in the story, Jesus lived a perfect life with no rebellion or self justifying or pride. He left his Father's house and went to a far country. His robe was stripped off so that the Father could give us a robe. The father gave us a ring on our finger. Jesus was given a ring of thorns on his head. We've been given wine and a party. Christ drunk vinegar and hung on a cross. Jesus took what we deserved, death and separation from the Father, so that we could be welcomed as sons and daughters. The response to the prodigal grace of the Father is prodigal gratitude.

Notes for Little Saints

What happened after the younger son had spent all his money (verse 14)? What did he do to stay alive?

Draw a picture of the younger son being so hungry that he wants to eat the pigs' food (verse 16).

How did the father treat the younger son when he came home? What did the father give to his son (verses 20-24)?

Draw a picture of the big party the father puts on for the son who came home.