

The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-16

November 7, 2021

Well we're in Luke 15 today, and you can turn there in your Bibles as we come to the third of the three parables that Jesus tells us in this chapter. This is the perfectly crafted, moving, beautiful story of the prodigal son. This has to be, by far, the best known, most famous story that Jesus ever told and for good reason. The story is perfect in every way. It's exquis, exquisitely rich in its detail. It's brilliant in vivid, living color that we can all identify with. It's affective in its pathos, yet we never find any hint of emotional manipulation at all because we all know as we read the story, how true to life it is.

The narrative arc of the story is one that we all recognize, it shows up time and time again in literature, in movies, in poetry. There are two sons who grow up in the home of

a loving father but they take his love for granted. One of the sons decides to leave, to seek his fortune and pleasure far from home, and when that turns bad, as it always does. He returns home in humiliation and when the father receives him with a heart of compassion, the heart of the brother who stayed behind seethes in resentment.

Specific details of that details of that narrative arc may differ from family to family. There are variations on the theme, depending on the situation, but no matter where we grow up, no matter what family we come from, no matter what time period in history, no matter the culture, that simple story about two brothers who spurn a loving father, captures the essence of the human condition.

In this story, Jesus summarizes all of us. We are, all of us, one of these kinds of sinners or maybe we're both. And that's what makes the story of the prodigal son so adaptable, because everybody is able to insert himself or herself into the story. You find that time and time again, in literature and poetry and art. Dutch painter Rembrandt, it's a richly detailed

oil painting called, *The Prodigal Son in the Brothel* and he famously portrayed himself and his wife, Saskia, as prodigal and prostitute in the brothel.

Many are drawn to this parable, and it has become, as one has put it, the subject of more painters and artists, composers and musicians, dramatists, writers, and poets, than any other parable of Jesus, full stop. No matter the individual situation, no matter how widely and variously these themes have been adapted by others, this story is impeccably accurate and precise in telling the tale of the human condition. Jesus is not telling a story about family strife on a merely human level. Two sons spurning the love of their father that tells the tale of all humanity.

All of us as fallen sinners have spurned the goodness, and the kindness and the provision of a loving God. All of us are sinners, all of us have spurned the love of God. And live in resentment and bitterness with one another. And there's a sense in which all of us, we need to come home, as it were, to be

reconciled to God, to love the God who is ever faithful in loving us from beginning to end.

It's back in Luke 15:1-2, the beginning of this chapter, Luke introduced the chapter by highlighting the contrast between two kinds of sinners, irreligious sinners, who know they're sinning and who do so willfully. And also religious sinners, who deceive themselves in pride and self-righteousness to think that they aren't sinners. The former are the tax collectors and sinners of verse 1, and the latter are the Pharisees and the scribes of verse 2. Both kinds of sinners, spurn the love of God. Therefore, both kinds of sinners are equidistant from God, that is, they are at an equal distance from God, both lost.

As we see in this parable, both kinds of sinners, though their sins are never ignored, they are not excused, they are actually put on display, and yet we see both sinners are treated with the same compassion and kindness, as God extends his mercy and his grace to both of them. For all those who repent, no matter what kind of sinner they may be, God will receive them back into the warmth and the love of his home.

With that in mind, find your way to verse 11 of Luke 15, Luke 15:11, and let's read the whole story together now. "And Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 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.

"And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed," to feed, "pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But 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! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'

"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. And the son said to his father, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 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. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'

"And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked," what, "what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in.

"His father came out and entreated him, 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. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. And it was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

We call the story, *The Prodigal Son*. I have no problem calling the entire story, *The Prodigal Son*, though it is a bit imprecise, because you can see from verse 11 and by the end of the parable, you can see the story involves two sons, not just the prodigal and though the younger son, the prodigal, receives a lot of attention in the story, he's the focus in the first and the second act in verses 11-24. The older son is featured in the final act of the story, verses 25-32, but notice that it is the father, who is the heroic figure in the story from start to finish.

Jesus sets up the story in verse 11 as the story of a man, a certain man who had two sons. He introduces us to the father first, in the final verses, it's the father's loving appeal that closes the story. His words are the last words that anyone hears. So Jesus frames the story as a father's plight. He tells the story in a voice that is sympathetic to an offended father. That is what we need to see. If God grants us eyes to see and ears to hear, that is what we will see. The unchanging perfection of a father's love from start to finish. How his goodness never ends. His patience abides the sorest of offenses coming from us, and his compassion never fails. The tenderness of the tone of his voice is always wooing us. It is the most basic, fundamental evidence of our fallen nature and our fallen condition that we don't trust this God.

There are no reasons to justify our distrust of him. We have no reason to blame him. We find no cause for stumbling in him. Anyone who accuses him of wrongdoing like these two brothers, they do so unjustly without any grounds whatsoever and this is Jesus' point. Especially for the self-righteous and the religious, this is Jesus' point. Remember, he tells the story, as it says in verse 2, he's answering the charge of the



Pharisees and the scribes who say, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." How dare he!

If he were righteous, if he were holy, if he's truly a prophet, if he's the messiah, he's not going to be with those kinds of people. Pharisees and scribes are portrayed there in joyless resentment, like the older brother, who despises his father for receiving the prodigal back into the home, for celebrating in joy after this costly stunt that this kid pulled in the household.

So Jesus tells the story for them, for their sake and he seeks to win them over. He speaks, as you can hear in the, in the tone, in tender tones of affection and compassion, even for the proud, he's there to win them over, he's there to show them the father's compassion. He wants to show them themselves as well in contrast to the father and his compassion. He basically holds up a mirror to let them see themselves as they really are graceless, compassionless.

At the same time, we need to realize that the emphasis on the prodigal, Jesus is also telling the story, so the tax collectors and sinners can really see themselves for how they really are as well. Their sins against the father are serious, inexcusable, shameful, terminally, degrading. So lest we take a soft stance on sinners, excusing them maybe because of the first two parables, as nothing more than ignorant and wandering sheep, poor creatures. Viewing their lost condition as no more guilty than an inanimate coin that haplessly falls between the floorboards; Jesus, in this story, he portrays the willfulness of their condition.

The blatancy of their sin, and the hurt that is caused by the irreligious sinner in his sins, it makes a mess. This final parable, of the three, it helps us to see what the previous two parables did not portray, namely that the lost sheep is guilty. And the lost sheep, though wandered and strayed in its ignorance, it really in truth, does not want to be found. In fact, when the shepherd comes searching, the lost sheep bites his hand, and throws itself into the bramble bush to get away.

Lost coin, also, is a guilty coin. The weight of its sin makes that coin too heavy to hold, the lost coin even covers itself in grease and graphite that it may not be held, so it can get away from the owner. There is a cost, as we see in the third parable, for getting lost and staying lost. There's a cost for wandering away from the father's home, from spurning his, the warmth of his love, or coming out from underneath his strong protection to cut oneself off from the support of his faithful and bountiful provision.

And that's what we're going to see today in verses 11-16. We're going to see the state of degradation for being lost, for being a lost son. So for today, as I said, verses 11-16, for today, the lost son. For next week, the loving father, verses 17-24, if I can get through that amount of text. And then the following week, we'll look at the lost brother verses 25-32. So the lost son, the loving father, and the lost brother.

But for today, our focus, the lost son, verses 11-16. In Proverbs 13:15, it says, second half of that proverb, "The way of transgressors is hard." "The way of transgressors is hard."

It may not seem that way at the start, when the sinner is still young, when the body is still strong, when he still seems to have the world by the tail, but all the signs are there from the very start and this is what we see in the parable of the lost son.

There are five characteristics that we are going to see here of every lost sinner. This is the evidence of a lost condition. Five characteristics, five characteristics of every lost sinner , and this is the proof, this is the evidence of his lost condition is these five characteristics. For every non-Christian who may be listening, what Jesus says here tells the tale of your fallen condition. This is who you are, this is how you look before a holy God. This story portrays your degradation, it explains your brokenness. Whether you have come to the point that you're aware of it or not, this is you.

And our hope is that God will regenerate you by his Spirit through the preaching of his word. We pray for you that he gives you ears to hear this story for yourself, so that you can repent and believe the Gospel of God's goodness, that he is good and

kind, and so willing to receive you into his home. For all of you Christians listening, these five characteristics of every lost sinner, listen, this is where we come from.

No matter what kind of sinner we've been, irreligious or religious, this is what we look like. This story is our story and it reminds us of the reasons that we have to give thanks to God. Deep, deep gratitude, profound joy before him, that we are saved from this lost condition. And so I hope that this morning, as we go through this and these reminders come to you as a Christian. That it will soften your heart toward the lost and it will evoke profound gratitude and joy in your own heart that carries you forward from here on to the end of your life.

There should be no reason for us as Christians to grumble, to complain, to be overcome with, with sorrow and grief, we don't grieve as the world grieves. We do grieve at times, but it's grieving as those with hope. We live in a state of gratitude, profoundly aware all the time, this is what we look like. We're amazed at what God has done. We also realize in humility as Christians, that these five characteristics of a

lost condition, they still afflict our hearts, don't they? They can resurface in our behavior, these characteristics, even, even as mature Christians we can find these characteristics tempting us.

The five characteristics of lostness, as we hear these unpacked here by Jesus, they're going to help us discern bad patterns in our thinking. So we can mortify our own sins, so we can live a life of repentance, so we can be constantly renewing our minds in the Word, as it's the goodness of God that compels us over and over to holy living. It's what I hope to see from us today, whether you're non-Christian or Christian listening, it's what I hope for you.

First characteristic of a lost sinner, number one, the lost sinner is shamefully selfish. The lost sinner is shamefully selfish. Look at verse 11, "And he said, 'There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.''" Many in the crowd, most of whom would lean more sympathetically toward the Pharisees and the scribes, for many of them, this

younger son's request is a shocking way to enter into a story. It's not that selfishness was unheard of. It's not that self-indulgent children are anything new.

The brazenness and the level of this kind of selfishness, it's hard for anyone's stomach and hear. Maybe hard to discern the offensive nature of the son's request but from here, from our twenty-first century vantage point, so let me just fill in some of the background for you. This is not just a kid who's asking his dad for a couple of bucks, he liked to go and vacation and do something cool, so he's asking his dad for help. This is not, even going further, it's not some kind of impulsive, narcissism, like, like a kid who's expecting his parent to be on the hook to help fund his profligacy, his, his self-indulgence.

What we see here, is not impulsive at all, in fact it's planned. This kid has been thinking about this a lot. He's thought this through. So let me put this into language that we might understand. Imagine your son coming to you, and he's in his late teens or early twenties, which is probably about the

age of the, the young man in this parable, and your son comes to you, and in a voice of cold determination, there's no love whatsoever in his eyes as he looks at you, and he says, Dad, I've been watching the accumulation of your wealth over the years, I've read the will, so I know what I'm going to inherit, let's, let's pretend you're dead now. So I can cash out my inheritance and leave this place, I can't wait any longer for you to die. I want out of your house, and I want out now.

There's ice forming in your veins, the sudden stoppage of your heart, as you're incredulous at such a brazen request. Totally dismayed that the son that you raised and nurtured and fed and provided for and clothed, that your wife did his laundry over and over and over again. You patched up his wounds, you helped him back into the, into life. You passed on your wisdom. Now he's looking in your eyes as he drives a spike into your heart.

And unbeknownst to the father, his son has been building up this resentment over years. He's tired of the farm life, tired of his family, tired of his older brother, lording it over

him, bossing him around, telling him what to do. He's tired of his father, his old ways, steadily plodding out along in life. Tired of that folksy wisdom that's outdated, antiquated, not up to date with all the cool stuff going on in the world, what does he know?

As we see in verse 13, what he wanted was not here in the home. What he wanted was far away, in an exciting, strange new world. He wants to travel. He wants to see the world. He wants to enjoy life just a bit. Doesn't want to sit around and rot, like his dad, like this farm, like all the same old stuff, just decaying and rusting and corrupting and corroding. So he wants his freedom and the pathway to freedom is to get money, and to get a lot of it. He's got the perfect place to get it, his super rich dad.

Commentators have different views about the legality of what the son is asking for, whether or not it was allowable in that day in the Jewish legal setting in the first century, to make such a request seems to me, on the surface to be a moot point, because Jesus is telling a story after all. In fiction,

you make up whatever details he wants to, provide the details, the elements that suit his purpose, but in case you're wondering, the story is historical, in, even though it's fiction.

The elements of the story are true to life. Turns out what the younger son asked for was, it was legally permissible, technically permissible, even if it was shameful and uncommon, it was technically allowed. In fact, it is the shame of making such a blatantly selfish, dishonorable request that prevented most people from making it, so you'd have to write a law against it. Didn't stop him though. Legally speaking, a father did not have to wait to bequeath his wealth to his children until after his death or even at his deathbed. He was free to read the will, so to speak, well before he was on his deathbed.

Maybe practical reasons for doing that, prepare them, help them to plan, disciple them to good financial, and economic, and farming practices and agriculture and all the rest. But even reading the will before his deathbed, if he did that, it didn't mean he relinquished all control of the capital, of the

interest, of the assets, of movable and immovable property, the father still had the right of provision from that wealth that he himself, by the way, had built.

Even if he chose to designate beneficiaries ahead of time, even if he chose to grant ownership, part ownership, full ownership, to allow his sons, his children to earn income from the interest, to start building their own wealth from the assets, making use of his property, he could do all of that and still maintain control.

What would be appropriate though, is for the father to take the initiative in reading the will to his sons. For a son to take the initiative, totally inappropriate. Deeply offensive and widely scandalous. The son is basically saying, I wish you were dead, because you're the only thing standing in the way of my freedom, which I plan to buy with that money just as soon as you're out of the way.

Look again at verse 12, notice what the younger son here is asking for, he says, "Give me the share of property that is

coming to me.” Good translation there, “Give me the share of the property that’s coming to me.” He’s not asking for his inheritance by the way, that would be the word *kleronomia* that comes, inheritance, comes with responsibility, with duty attached, with honor. Instead he uses the word *ousia*. He wants the goods. He wants the livelihood, or what comes from that. He wants the riches. He wants the wealth that accrues to people like his dad who work hard over a lifetime, sacrificing a lot for it, faithfully over many, many years. He wants that, without the work. He doesn’t want the responsibility, just the stuff. Give me the portion of the estate that belongs to me. That’s another way you can read it. He wants all the wealth that’s coming to him, and none of the responsibility that comes with that wealth.

He’s self-indulgent to the hilt, to the core of his being. He wants the pay without the rank. He wants the blessing without the burden. He wants the share of the reward and no share in the responsibility. So in this money grab, he wants to divest himself of everything that ties him to his father. The responsibility for earning wealth, for maintaining wealth, for protecting wealth. He wants no part in the family name. No part

in the father. He wants no responsibility for preserving the family's respect, for living in, in a way that's worthy of the family name. He wants no responsibility for carrying out the family's duties to the community, maintaining its influence, protecting its reputation, he wants out.

If it weren't a family, we would see this as a brazen attempt at robbery. Might as well be holding a gun to, at his father's chest to more accurately portray exactly what he's doing here, even though there's no physical violence involved here, this is patricide in the first degree. So what caused him to despise his father so much? Obviously, his dad's done something to offend him deeply. That's what we say today, right? Any victim, any kid that cries foul. We listen to the kid and we ignore the plea of the parent.

What causes any lost sinner to think and speak and act in such shamelessly selfish ways, blaming God instead of themselves? If you asked this lost son, hey, do you love your dad? Do you love your family? You know what he'd plea? Of course I do! Lost sinners know it's bad to hate your parents, bad to

hate your family. They often won't admit hatred, because they refuse to think at a level deep enough to expose the most vile thoughts in their thoughts, the most shameless motivations that they carry around with them, but this is the way of every sinner.

This is the way of pride and selfishness. It is blinding and it is sinful to the core. It is disordered and ultimately violent against anyone or anything that stands in its way, even close relations, like loving, giving, compassionate parents. That's the way with this kid, it's the way with all lost sinners. I even seen some redeemed sinners, well-educated ones, who ought to know better. Theologically informed Christians, and they are oblivious to the fact that they are acting in the same way as this.

So guard yourself, lest you think low of this lost son and high of yourself. Don't be a Pharisee, get into the flow here and see, this is me. I can be just like this. Let's trace the thinking here, the son's growing desire for autonomy, growing up in a, a home where he's well provided for, but his desire for

autonomy, for freedom, for pleasure, it means that the ordered life of the home, with all of its implicit and explicit demands for his discipline, for his self-control, to fulfill his responsibilities, and his duties in the home, this son's desire to pursue his own happiness on his own terms, that desire begins to taint his view against his dad, against the well-ordered home life.

It makes him resent restraint. It makes him buck against it. The home, the walls of the home turn into the walls of a prison for him, and they close in more and more. They're like bars on a cage. His pining for adventure creates tensions in the home, as he's not attentive to his work any longer, but he's more looking to the ends of the earth. Listening out for news from the merchants of what happened over there, or what happened over there. If he had Google and the internet, he'd be searching it all the time, listening to stories and listening to things that are going on all around the world, and never paying attention to what's right in front of him.

Never grateful for what God has given him in his own lap. Never thinking twice about the lap he sits in, the one that provides for him, the one that cares for him, who teaches him, who loves him. He's got resentment toward responsibility, he wants out. In his ignorance, he's unable at this point to appreciate his father's hard work. He can't see all the sacrifices his father has made over the course of his life, all for the good of other people by the way, his wife, his children, his sons, his servants; how the righteous even cares, it says in Proverbs, cares for his animals.

In his pride, the son has an irrationally high view of his own potential. He estimates himself way too highly. He believes that just given the chance, he's going to do very well for himself, he's going to make his own way, he's going to have more, way more fun doing it if he can just get away from the repressive, and oppressive strictures of his father's house.

That's the first characteristic of a lost sinner portrayed in this lost son, that he's selfish to the core and shamelessly so. Why is he shameless about it? Because he's blind to it, by

his own pride, by his own high estimation of himself, he can't see himself for what he really is, so he's shameless, he's shameful in how he acts.

That's the first characteristic, here's the second one. Number two, the lost sinner is inconsiderately ambitious. The lost sinner is inconsiderately ambitious. You don't want to write out the big long word inconsiderately, that's fine, there's a lot of syllables in that word, so just write, he's ambitious. Selfishly ambitious and he's inconsiderate. "The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.'"

And then it says this, a very sad sentence, it's weighted with a lot of meaning, "And he divided his property between them. Not many days later," it says, "the young son," well, verse 13 continues, he took off, he left, gone. Deuteronomy 21:17, protects the right of a double portion for the older brother, who's the firstborn son. He gets, quote, from Deuteronomy 21:17, he gets, "a double portion of all that the

father has, as the first fruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his.”

So only two sons in this story. One third of the estate is going to go to the younger son. Two thirds to the older brother or the first born, one third to the younger son, dividing it up three ways. And in fact if you had a big family, twelve sons, small portions, three, two sons, big portions, right? I'm not great at math, but I can figure that out. The immovable property, the land, its structures, its improvements. All the immovable properties stayed with the older brother, it belonged to the family by right of tribal inheritance that was prescribed in the book of Numbers allotted by Joshua in the book of Joshua.

But the movable property, all the stuff on top of the land, livestock, vessels, carts, furniture, materials, supplies, anything of value like money, gold, jewelry and all that stuff. All of these things, the father here in that little sentence in verse 12 at the end of verse 12. All these things the father all of a sudden had to assess, provide evaluation, and divide it appropriately and apportion out to the sons and distribute it,

by the way, to his two sons. You think that took some time and effort? You better believe it. You think that maybe that was an unwelcome interruption to his father, the father's workflow? It was a wholly unpleasant task, a painful one.

Notice the father divided his property between them. No protest coming from the older son. Firstborn is the one who's gonna receive the double portion of the estate. He's gonna bear the responsibility of carrying forward the family name. He's gonna use his father's wealth to create more wealth. But there's no protest whatsoever coming out of him. To see his father subjected like this, to this onerous task.

The father is dividing, distributing his wealth and he does so against every impulse here, against reason, against wisdom even. In the book, the apocryphal book called The Wisdom of Sirach, it's an apocryphal book, written by Ben Sira around 200 BC, so 200 years before Christ. This book, it's a passage of proverbial wisdom that warns fathers against this very thing, against doing what the father is doing right here.

Sirach 33 and verses 20-24 say this, "To son or wife, to brother or friend," and speaks to the father, speaks to the landowner, "To son or wife to brother or friend, do not give power over yourself as long as you live, while you are still alive and have breath in you. Do not let anyone take your place, for it's better that your children should ask from you than that you should look to the hand of your children. Excel in all that you do. Bring no stain upon your honor. At the time when you end the days of your life, in the hour of death, distribute your inheritance."

Why is that such a wise word of caution? Because we all know, and we know this more and more the older we get. The young are fickle. They're unsettled, they're immature, they're inexperienced, they're unwise in the world, giving them a cash payout when they're too young to work for it, to appreciate it, it can ruin them. They need experience to humble them, to make them teachable, soften their hearts, to turn all the knowledge that they gain throughout life, into wisdom, knowledge, righteously applied.

Many in the crowd are gonna hear this father's actions and they're going to recognize the lack of wisdom represented by the father who's acquiescing, inexplicably acquiescing to the younger son's brazen request. What is he doing? This is giving into his selfishness. Don't feed it. Not only that, but they could imagine as we can how painful this would be for him. This truly is adding insult to injury. As not only he had the injury. The insult of feeling this from his son, but now he's got to do the duty of evaluating all his property. He's gotta do this because he's gonna give it to the son who, not only doesn't deserve it, but is going to ruin himself. It's clear, it's obvious.

He's gotta get every piece of property assessed. He's got to get it ready for a premature estate sale, even though he's not dead yet. Just because his two sons wish he were dead. Why would he do this? I mean, against every righteous impulse, against his son's disobedience and disrespect. It's against his heart's longing, against all reason and all sound wisdom. Why would the father give in? Why would he just hand everything over?

Well, it's important to just pause and note here that Jesus' story, the point of his story is not to teach about wise parenting, this is not a parenting seminar he is giving, this is not a lesson in estate planning, this is not about how to plan your financial future. This is not a seminar, economic seminar, or anything like that, it's, this is not about the best course of action, even when your children, heaven forbid, act as shamefully and self-centeredly as this kid has. So don't take parenting advice from this.

There's a theological principle that's on display here for us, and it's this principle. It's the principle of judicial abandonment. The principle of judicial abandonment. God gives them over. Jesus is showing us here, at this point what it looks like when God hands the sinner over to his sins, to the consequences of his sins. It's a frightening reality, isn't it? When God hands sinners over to their desires, that's the path that we see traced in Romans chapter 1.

Romans 1 and it says this in verse 24 and verse 26 and verse 28. Same verb used over and over, repeated refrain. God

gave them over. God gave them over. God gave them over. Why does God do that? Does he delight in rubbing the sinner, sinner's nose in his own mess? Not at all. God does not delight in wickedness. He does not delight in punishing the sinner, but he does delight in righteousness, does delight in grace and both of those things are at play here in handing the sinner over.

First, because God does not coerce anyone to love him. He has given us, by virtue of us being created in his own image, he's given us as free creatures, the rights and the responsibility to make choices. Notice, I said, having choices is a right, and it's a responsibility of a creature created in God's image. We choose, according to our own desires. We do the thing that we want to do. We choose what our nature desires. That's what the father, the father in the story is picturing, the way that God too, allows sinners to go their own way, even though it's not best.

Second, in allowing sinners to go their own way, though God by his kindness and his grace, he adds a number of restraints. Government is a restraint, family is a restraint, marriage is a

restraint. All these restraints that he gives by his common grace, but in allowing sinners to go their own way in handing sinners over to the results, even though it increases in sin and adds more guilt and covers them in more shame. Listen, the effect of guilt and shame is to weary the sinner in his sinful ways.

You understand the law of diminishing returns and you notice how sin is like that. You sin this much, and it's good. And you try to sin that much again, over and over again, and it's not enough and you gotta go a little bit further and so you sin at that level and you sin at that level and that level and that level and finally you find yourself keeping company with the devil himself.

The effect of that is to make us sick of sin. The sinner to see his sinful ways and see its error, its futility, its degradation. It's on full display in this story, we haven't gotten there yet, but we will. But the only hope for the airing sinner then is third, God giving the sinner a new nature. By his grace, he makes the dead sinner alive, causing him to be born

again and the thinking of this new nature, the new man, means that the will is truly free, finally free, able to choose the good.

When a sinner turns to Christ, it's wholly by God's grace and it is according to human choice, at the same time. That love of a sinner given a new nature is not coerced, it's never forced, it is freely given, because there's a new nature with new desires, new longings. Even in judicial abandonment, God is showing his grace, his patience, his kindness. He's always working to encourage the sinner's repentance.

That's what Jesus is picturing here as this father, rather sorrowfully, and rather painfully divides his estate up, and he distributes his wealth to these two undeserving sons. In the time that it takes for the father to do that, to complete this painful, onerous task, dividing all the movable property between his two sons.

You know what the younger sons been doing during all this time? He has been using the time to plan his trip. No thought

for his father's grief. Just a feeling of impatience as he wants to get out of there. He wants his father to hurry up, finish already. So he can just make a hasty exit. He hasn't verbalized it, but, and he'd never admit it. But his actions say everything here. On his way out the door, he's saying, you're dead to me, I'm dead to you, we're through.

This leads to a third characteristic of a lost sinner. Number three, the lost sinner is, number three, foolishly reckless. The lost sinner, number three, is foolishly reckless. As I said, he can't stand waiting for the father to finish up with all his evaluations and all his Abacus work and all his math, making the assessments and doing the right sale of certain items, taking his time.

In fact, he judges him evilly for it and says, I know why he's doing this, he's trying to hold on to me. He's taking all this time because he's hoping I'll wear out of this desire I have, that's not gonna happen. Finally he gets the one third that's his. It's a big chunk of change. You'll see in verse 22, his father's wealth includes fine clothing, jewelry, household

servants. If there are household servants, that means there are a lot of servants working out in the fields as well.

He's got the means to set aside some animals for, just for feasts, provisional animals for feasts, down in verse 25. He even has a large banquet hall and notice it's inside the house, big enough to host a celebration, including expensive entertainments, loud music, dancing, heard all the way from outside as his father, as his brother, comes in from the field. There is a whole lot of money coming his way and he's got big, big plans, far, far away from this dusty little one horse town.

Look at verse 13, "Not many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country and there he squandered his property in reckless living." The verb that's translated there, gathered all he had, *sunagó*. In this context, it means, to turn into cash. That is, he's converting all that movable property that he received, the goats, the sheep, the cattle, all the movable property, he's converting that property into money. And he does so it says, within a few days, in a hurry.

His father would have been slow, wise, careful, in dividing and distributing the estate to his sons because he loves them. He wants him to get everything coming to them. This kid provides quite the contrast to that. In a great haste, within a few days it says he liquidates all of his, his newly acquired assets. No way he's gonna get a good purchase price for any of those assets from any shrewd buyer. And believe me, everybody in town knew what kind of shameful kid this was, what he had done to his father. What he was planning to do, what a hurry he's in.

The resentful older brother would make sure that that was known. He's not going to get a good price for anything, even here. You can see the prodigal emerging from this kid's heart. He, the squandering has already started even before he's left home. He has no intention of coming back to this place, so no need to leave anything behind. No need to leave a bank account. He liquidates his one third share of the wealth in a hurry, and he leaves home, carrying suitcases of cash.

As he enters into this faraway country, can you guess what those people are thinking? Here's this young, cocky, naive Jewish kid walking into town carrying bags of cash. Hmm, easy mark, free lunch. The party's on him everyone. Doesn't take long before he's invited everywhere. He's got a whole host of new acquaintances and friends. Seems to be such a friendly place. Really seems to be working out for him, just as he thought it would.

People in this exotic faraway land are rolling out the red carpet for him. He's a foreigner in their midst, but they're making him feel right at home, really, really welcome. Invite him to all their parties, banquets, feasts. They're really eager to share all their culture with him. All the foods he can't get there, he can have here. Show him a good time. Just as friendly as they can be. As long as he keeps picking up the tab.

In truth, we need to see that these people hanging around this kid are as rapacious as wolves. They're like sharks that smell blood in the water, and they're pouncing. Low morals among them, bad character because people who are willing to hang out

with the young and the inexperienced, attracted to their wealth. They're of the same ilk. They love the free party provided by this rich kid. These are not good people.

This kid doesn't come with nobility and virtue on his sleeves. Like attracts like. His newfound friends were just like he is. They're bottom shelf character people. Doesn't take long before he's burn through all that cash. He eats at the best restaurants, stays at the best hotels, drinks the finest wines. He indulges all of his sensual appetites, saying no to nothing. He tries new things, enjoys new experiences. He's flashing his cash. He's tipping everyone he sees. He's buying expensive gifts because he needs to keep those new friends close. Keep them interested.

The apparent safety of anonymity far from home, far away from family, far away from anyone who cares enough to correct him. Anyone to hold him accountable and keep him safe from himself. It's there it says that he squandered his property in reckless living. What he demanded of his father, what his father labored a lifetime to provide for him, what he, what he suffered

heartbreak, to disperse to him. This kid has blown it in living wastefully.

That expression *zao asotos* that's where we get the concept of the prodigal. Comes from *asotia* means dissolute, debauched, indulgent, dissipated, profligate, and all with a flair for the extravagant. One source I read found a really helpful explanation from Aristotle of all people. He says this, "We label as prodigal those who are incontinent and those who become spendthrifts to satisfy their intemperance. That is why prodigals have such a bad reputation. They have several vices all at once. Properly speaking," Aristotle says, "The word prodigal refers to the one who has only the sole vicious tendency to destroy his means of subsistence." End Quote.

That's a good way to think about the prodigal and what this is, the sole vicious tendency to destroy his means of subsistence. You wanna picture that? He's cutting off the branch he's sitting on. It's like a cartoon character. Albert Plummer sums it up this way, "It'd cost him nothing to collect this

wealth together and he squanders it as easily as he acquired it."

We see that all the time, don't we in those who win the Lotto? They win some big huge million, multimillion dollar prize. You think, wow, they're set for life. No, they're not. They're set for a few months turns out. Sadly, the timing of his squandering everything couldn't be worse. He's about to become the victim of climate change here if you notice in the text. He said the lost sinner here is shamefully selfish. He's inconsiderately ambitious. He's foolishly reckless, and now his bad character like catches up with him, doesn't it?

Number four, the lost sinner is invincibly stubborn. The lost sinner is invincibly stubborn. It says, "When he spent everything a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need." Love how Jesus throws in a little twist of divine providence into the story, really moves the story along. Jesus describes here a famine. It's severe, it's widespread. It's all throughout the country, according to the grammar there, it's everywhere. So with no cash left, reality catches up to this kid

and bites him and even though reality bites him hard here, he still thinks he can figure this out.

Here's the plan. It says there, "He went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country." Hired himself out, that's an unfortunate translation in view of the vividness of this term here. The verb shows in the King James version, the NAS version, capture the more basic sense. It says, "He went and joined himself to one of the citizens. He attached himself to the man." The, the literal expression, literal expression there is he glued himself to this guy. So what does he do? What's his plan consist of? He finds someone important.

It's kind of ironic here because he's probably of the same stature of his father, ironically. Find somebody important in the land, a citizen of that country who owns enough and he sticks with that guy. Younger son here is, he's invincibly stubborn. He is invincibly ignorant too. He, he, he's still under the illusion that he's something. He still esteems himself highly. He thinks all that spending earned him friends, true friends.

He's under the illusion that this older man is impressed with him, with his, brings his list of qualifications, his, his previous experiences all on his resume, and where did he get all that experience? Family farm, under his father, got his father's wisdom. The citizen farmer here is no dummy though. He's watched this kid, entitled kid come into town. He's heard about him. He's the spoiled rich kid. He's seen all of them come and go. It's the same story. He's impressing everyone with wads of cash, eating fancy food, drinking with scoundrels, cavorting with prostitutes.

This man is not impressed at all. He's got him all figured out. The kid's obviously far from home. He's a foreigner in their midst. There's a good reason he's this far from home. Well, it's not a good reason, something bad, something hidden, something he doesn't know. But he doesn't have to figure it out. He knows what's there. This kid's got daddy issues. He's got family problems, social issues, legal issues. He's in trouble.

This man would be a fool to trust him, and this man is no fool. He didn't accomplish what he accomplished through playing the fool, but that doesn't mean he can't use this kid. He's gonna use him like everybody else. Might seem like there's nothing worse, especially during a severe drought to have some foreign kid see you as his survival strategy, to attach himself to you, to glue himself to you. So to deal with this unwelcome pest, someone he doesn't trust at all, he sends this Jewish boy into the fields, end of verse 15, "to feed his pigs."

What does a prodigal do? Does this stop him? Does he say, you know what? Something is not going right here? No, he follows the stubbornness of his own heart, an invincible stubbornness. And he takes the job. Why is this evidence of invincible stubbornness? For one thing, he's just not stopped to assess what's got him to this point. He's been foolish in cashing out, in not saving anything, not tucking, tucking something away for savings and famine relief.

He's been foolish in blowing all this money. He's been foolish in playing when he ought to be working. He's been

foolish in his choice of companions. He was foolish to flee to foreigners in the first place and leaving behind true prosperity. Foolish to leave home at all. Not once here has he stopped to question himself. Not once does he doubt his own judgment, even in this low time, with this level of failure, he still trusts in his own thinking. Still making his own plans, trusting his own solutions, taking the job by feeding this Gentile's pigs.

His invincible stubbornness has caused him to let go of the last shred of dignity that he ever had. Just degrading employment for anyone to feed pigs for a living, but it's scandalous level of disgrace for a Jew. John Davis says, "To feed swine was the lowest and most despicable occupation, to which a Jew could be reduced." The rabbis used to say, "Cursed is everyone who keeps and breeds pigs."

It makes those who support the accursed pig farmer feeding his pigs at the lowest level of low, to a Jew. This young man would know that, he's raised as a Jew. The situation is desperate and there's this famine to consider, my growling

stomach. Still, his conscience is nagging him about his failures. Reminds him of his profligacy, his wastefulness, his carelessness that got him into this mess in the first place. His conscience accuses him that he has descended about as low as he can go, and this is where his stubborn heart has taken him. Degrading him to the very bottom, to the lowest of the low, into the slime with the pigs. Kid is lost.

He is willfully lost. He is guilty. He's humiliated. He is degraded. He is desperately low, and listen, it is all his own fault. It's in this condition, finally, that he comes to his breaking point. The lost sinner is shamefully selfish, inconsiderately ambitious, foolishly reckless, invincibly stubborn and now, with no money, no savings, reduced to doing unskilled, shameful labor on the unclean pig farm, he is all out of options.

So, final characteristic of the lost. Number five, the lost sinner is eventually broken. The lost sinner is eventually broken. "He went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he

was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything."

Carob pods were a staple in the diet of John the Baptist. They could be eaten by humans. Also, it was known as the locust tree, not because locusts ate from it, but because they didn't. Locusts actually eat anything green, but they won't eat this. Even locusts don't stoop so low. The carob tree is sturdy, it's hardy, it's drought resistant, had a thick trunk, sturdy branches. It grows, grows to heights about twenty-five to fifty feet. Carob tree is a, it's a flowering evergreen. It has broad, green, feather shaped leaves. The fruit it produces are legumes. So it's a carob pod which contains ten to fifteen hard, brown seeds inside of this pod. And the pod is like a long, thick, flat pod and shaped like a, like a horn, about an inch or, or an inch and a half wide and about five to six inches long.

That's where the Greek name actually comes from is its shape. *Keration*, it comes from, it's the diminutive of the word *keras*, horn. So little horn is what it looks like. A little horn, about six inches long. It's curved like a horn, it's flat,

has a wrinkled surface, turns dark brown and leathery when it matures.

Good thing about the carob tree, virtually drought proof, so it's still bears fruit in times of famine. It's locust proof as well, so they, even they can't eat it. But the carob pods are packed with nutrients. I don't see it as much today, but there was a time when I used to see carob, carob stuff everywhere. There was a carob craze, replacing all kinds of chocolate products with carob as if that's a good idea. So no more chocolate chip cookies. Instead, carob chip, chip cookies. Didn't catch on, I'm very thankful to say.

But the pods, these pods can be processed, they can be crushed, turned into pulp. They're ground into different sizes for animal feed or flour, or carbon bean meal. So they're edible. They're just not good, and they're hard to eat, but pigs can eat them. They can and do eat virtually anything. So the Gentile pig farmer feeds his pigs these carob pods, cheap, drought proof animal fodder, sends this Jewish kid into his pigsties to keep his pigs alive during the severe drought.

And we find out here that whatever he's paying this kid, it is not enough because Jesus says, verse 16, "he is longing." Very strong word there, *epithumeó*, the word for lusting, for strong visceral desire. "He's longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate." He couldn't get enough to eat. The guy's not paying him enough to survive, and the people of this land are cruel because "no one gave him anything."

In other words, he's less valuable to them than an animal. Of less value than a vile unclean pig. They know that at least the pigs, unlike him, the, the pigs are going to provide meat they can eat. This human being has no better use than to keep sustaining their food source during this famine. And even if he were to, for lack of food, drop over dead in the pigsty, pigs will eat that too. They're covered.

When you're longing to eat carob pods, and if you know what I'm talking about, that doesn't look good. You know you're in a state of desperation when you're willing to gnaw on this leathered looking substance. It's like you're willing to eat,

you hear this in times of famine and starvation, people willing to eat their boot soles, leather. They chew on it, and that's the same thing here. When you're at the point, when you're that hungry when you're at the point that you are envying the pigs. Listen, you're in a really, really bad place.

And now the son's, lost son's journey to the depths of degradation, it's now complete. He's gone from beloved son to total stranger. From stranger to lowlife, from lowlife to slave. He's gone from slave to animal, and a pig no less, and lower still. From pig to pariah of less value than an unclean pig, and even if he, if worse, comes to worse, and he dies, now he's pig food. In his lost condition, he might as well be dead, which is exactly how the father describes him, verse 24, verse 32.

Look the Pharisees and scribes need not worry that Jesus has some kind of naive view about the true condition of tax collectors and the sinful rabble that surrounds them. Jesus knows them, as he knows all people as he knows us, you and me as well. He knows exactly what they are and the wonder of all

wonders is that he loves them still. That he has compassion for them.

In this story, Jesus has described the condition of the tax collectors really, they're in league with Rome. They're being used just like the lost son was used. He's beholden the last son to a Gentile master who cares nothing about degrading him for his own purposes. It's a picture of how the Roman overlords also treated the tax collectors. They didn't respect them, turning on their own people, turncoats. So they degraded them further and further. They reduced them to servile labor, of taking money from their own fellow Jews. So they're pariahs, they're all castaways.

And all those sinners, all of them exposed to the person and the work of Jesus Christ. All of them looking up and seeing his perfection, hearing his gracious teaching. Hearing the promise of salvation for anyone who will confess himself a sinner. Confess his personal sins against a holy God, repent of them and put his trust in Jesus Christ. All those sinners, they're coming to him in droves to find in him full and free

salvation. No more condemnation. They just need to come to their breaking point. Just need to look up from the dark muck of the pigsty that they're lying around in to see the bright and the beautiful contrast of Jesus Christ, to come to their senses by God's grace and believe in him, follow him.

That's where we're gonna find this lost son when we come back next week. He's finally come to the breaking point. He's suffered the consequences of trusting in himself. He has nothing left. All is lost, it's by his own folly, his own doing. He has nothing left to live with, to live for. He's covered in shame. He's latched onto this unsympathetic Gentile, a man who cares nothing for him, but just wants to use him like everybody else. He's forgotten in this strange foreign land, uncared for in this pigsty, defiled, starving, with no sympathy from the strangers whose company that he once longed to keep.

And now, left all alone with his thoughts. An accusing conscience, haunting memories of home, verse 17, it says, "He comes to himself." That's the turning point. "Comes to himself." That's the gracious working of God evident in his life to lead

this sinner to repentance. So we'll pick it up there next week to see the blessed work of repentance. To see the compassion of a loving father, who's eager to see this lost son found, and his dead son, raised to new life.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for sending us our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ to be so compassionate and kind to us, when we are just like this lost son. Even if we play the part of the older brother we're lost in just a different way. Our sins are just as offensive to you. Our corruption is just as deep.

There is no one righteous, not even one. And Father, were it not for your grace, none of us would seek you. None of us would find you. None of us would be acceptable to you because we're covered in filth. And so we thank you so much father, that you have granted us the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ to tell us stories of your love and compassion like this one.

We can all identify with these loveless sons, who have spurned your grace and kindness. Who have not emphasized your

GRACE CHURCH



Grace

goodness, but instead we emphasize your restriction. How dare we. You've been so kind. So father, if there is any hard heart here, please break it. Please bring them to the end of their selves even now and don't let the degradation take any further effect, but stop it cold. And any lost sinner here, may look to you and find full and free salvation. For those of us who know you, may we rejoice and give thanks, because you are our great God and Savior. We love you, in Jesus' name, amen.