

FORGETTING THE FATHER, LUKE 15:11–32

The Prodigal God #3

◆**Intro:** Kevin Baugh has his own country—The Republic of Molossia—and if you don't mind, he'd prefer you call him "His Excellency Kevin Baugh." After all, he has an impressive khaki uniform with six big medals, a gold braid, epaulets at the shoulders, and a blue, white, and green sash. Oh—and a general's cap with a gold starburst over the bill. Wanna see a



picture? [**show pict**] Never heard of The Republic of Molossia? That's understandable, because it consists of Baugh's three-bedroom house and 1.3 acre yard outside of Dayton,

Nevada. According to an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, "He has a space program (a model rocket), a currency (pegged to the value of chocolate-chip cookie dough), a railroad (model size), a national sport (broomball), and—in his landlocked desert region—a navy (an inflatable boat)." The newspaper goes on to say: "Baugh, a 45-year-old father of two, is a micro-nationalist, one of a wacky band of do-it-yourself nation builders who raise flags over their front yards and declare their property to be, as Baugh puts it 'the kingdom of me.'" For Baugh, it's a fun joke, but he's joking about what all humans want to do—build a "kingdom of me."

◆See if you can complete this statement (from Exodus 20): "you shall have no other... (gods' before me.)" OK. Lets try another: "do not make for yourselves any... (graven images)." We are not to have idols, something on the throne of our life besides God. I

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hope we can come to see that this command is an insistence on joy of pursuing what is very best and most beautiful. It's also a truth hinted at in the Parable of the Prodigal Father.

◆ Last week we talked a bit about getting past our own selfie. This week we'll look at some other things the lost sons set up, and that we might be setting up as our idols; that is, the things we turn to for joy instead of the true God.

◆ **1. I need to put away my idols.** I know this by God's wisdom and I know this because they're not working. That's also why we know it better as we get older. But set them up we do anyway. You can tell purely by the fact that we have not set our love, I mean our day by day, minute by minute love -on the Father, our God, the one giving us our minutes. I talked to a fellow pastor the other day and he said that some people in his church actually say they're taking/took the summer off from church, kinda like its a job or a chore, I suppose. Still, to hear the Bible talk about the place of attention to worshiping God in the life of a human being, it'd be more like taking the summer off from say, *eating*. No spiritual nourishment for a while, ie. we have other things we look to for joy in the soul.

◆ Isn't it true that we all still look constantly for peace, solace. We all pretty much all the time long for joy, delight, inner satisfaction. When we don't feel these we turn to our idols, right?

◆ Mediate on the cool sci-fi movie we watched, or a racy scene from a romance novel.

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- ◆ Play more PS3, or Assassins Creed.
 - ◆ Eat our favorite candy, or drink our favorite beer.
 - ◆ Look at pictures of beautiful people.
- ◆ My point is not that all these things are bad. They can be as we measure them against the Word of God. And they can be gifts in the proper context. What I'm observing is how *we run to them for peace often without ever thinking about the God who gives us all things*. Even when in our true selves we know Jesus, love Jesus –still we can easily default back to our false selves, that part that disagrees with God, at least for some moments. When we do we replace God on the throne with our Bud Light, or a sexual encounter, or playing our smart phone, or whatever it is that we have decided is our current "BFF".
- ◆ This is one of the things that Jesus is telling us in the parable. The lost sons had idols too. They completely missed the love of their dad. The younger son had his eyes set off in adventure, new people, new places. Dad's wealth was a means to get there. He'd just as soon have dad die and get out of the way. He never noticed that of all the beings in the universe, dad was the one person who really loved him! And the elder brother was also waiting for dad's stuff, only behaving his way to getting it at home. Verse 29 shows us that he sees himself as "slaving for" the father with no payoff, no party time. He's waiting for Dad to die too. Both sons have forgotten the Father and by implication for us, we can forget God in religion, as well as in rebellion.

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Everyone is looking for God. Idolatry is deciding something else is god for us. GK Chesterton is famous for saying that no man ever knocked on the door of a brothel who wasn't looking for God. How can he say that? Is he right?

◆ Like the older brother, we might be steady church members and miss the Father's love altogether. We might just be trying to keep him from punishing us worse for the bad things we did. Or hoping that putting our time in is gonna count for something later on the heavenly scales. Or finding our meaning in life by being a conservative person. This could be totally missing God in church.

◆ Like the younger brother we might have no use for church at all unless someone is getting married or buried. The tree stand or the golf course is what keeps our mind off the pressures of life. It never occurs to us to actually think about God in those places, or that God might like to actually say something to us in one of those places.

◆ The parable is Jesus' invitation to both audiences (Pharisees and porn stars) to give up their idols and embrace the Father's love. Now to appreciate that invitation, let's take another look at what we are being invited to.

◆ **2. Can I believe that there is no thing, and no one more beautiful than my Creator?** Fifteen-hundred years ago St. Augustine observed that love is always about beauty. Beauty attracts. Beauty engages. When we see a beautiful person we

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feel “drawn” to them. We want to be near them, maybe speak to them. When we see a beautiful sports move, the muscles in our faces form an involuntary smile. We feel delight at we want to celebrate it, praise it, shout about it. Relive it. We tell the story to anyone, even the other people who just saw it with you! (“Did you see that? How he slipped around that other guy, and then faked left, and then shot on goal like...?”) We want to capture beauty on film, or canvas and keep it close. Augustine was pretty observant. And like the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes (OT) Augustine led a life of “trying it all” until God got a hold on him. Like Solomon in Ecclesiastes records, Augustine sought money, entertainment, women, parties, education, fame and finally came to the conclusion that there was nothing more beautiful than an already perfectly happy Being who would lower himself into an unhappy world and take on misery and hurt so that ungrateful and undeserving beings (that’s us) could join him in his happy home. That’s the person the Prodigal Father parable is about: it’s telling us that there is nothing more beautiful than the Father (God) and home.

◆v11 The father divided/tore open his “life”, his bios, for the sake of his fool son. Who knows? Likely in his wisdom he knew the son would blow it all pretty quickly and be back in need. That the son wasted his wealth is no shock. People do that every day! Work hard, earn a lot of money -spend it all on booze. Put your back into the labor on the line at the

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factory, and buy paper lotto tickets that by necessity must most of the time have no value. No, the shock is that Dad lets the son try it at all and still doesn't write him off. The shock is not that the son's idol fails him, but the Dad still loves him.

◆v20 We saw last time that Dad was watching, and waiting for the return of the son. That he broke social protocol and ran through the village like a elementary school boy. That he buried his face in the neck of his brazen and foolish son. And this is true of God's view of you. *God has a strange unexplainable affinity for the human race. He can make galaxies, over 150 billion of them but he counts not only stars. He counts your heart beats and your hairs.*

◆“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” *Luke 12:6, 7, NIV.*

◆**B.** The problem the lost sons had and the problem we have is that we have disordered our loves. Augustine observed this as well. He said, “Every man who commits murder does so because he loves something. Because he loves something too much. And that is the motive of his crime.” It is a disordered love and a disordered love is what we call an idol, a replacement for the real love. That of course is the essence of sin; replacing God. Refusing to find your deepest identity in your relationship to God. Making

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merely good things your ultimate good. A good roast chicken is a worthy desire. But not as worthy as a human child. If you put a roast chicken over a human child it is out-of-order love. A human being is a marvelous thing, but not as good as God for the object of your love. If you put your romance over God, it is disordered love in the same way.

◆C. Disordered loves have dangerous consequences. And building your identity apart from God is unstable. If you make your “good parenting” your identity and your child fails you, you have guilt and disillusion because your sense of self was tied to her as an expression of you. Her lack of achievement will mean your whole life was a failure. If you elevate your partner as your ultimate joy, any shortcoming in him or her becomes a major threat to you that you must worry about correcting because your identity is at stake.

◆Further, when we turn good things into ultimate things, we become enslaved by them. And our enslavement in turn ruins society around us. Our gods, or self-identities naturally lead to the exclusion of other people in society. For example, if succeeding at work is your ultimate sense of self, you must serve work with all you have! If someone gets in the way of that, they are a threat to who you are and you will likely not chose in their favor. If you get your identity from your political position, you must despise and demonize the opposition to save your self. If your ultimate sense of

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significance is in your ethnicity and heritage, then you must by nature feel superior to other races, or worry that they feel superior to you. If you pride yourself as being very moral, then you will feel superior to people you think are not (the Pharisees problem). Anything but God as your highest love will fragment both us and our society. Augustine said it. Philosopher Kierkegaard said it. Jonathan Edwards said it. When we chose to have another god we become too addicted (like the younger brother) to care about community, others, love. Or we become too angry, and frustrated (like the older brother) to care about community, others, love.

◆**C.** Now, what if you base your life on the love of the Father as Christ teaches us? What if he's your God, and you base your significance in belonging to him? Tim Keller reminds us

◆“If Jesus is your center and Lord and you fail him, he will forgive you. Your career can't die for your sins. You might say, “If I were a Christian I'd be going around pursued by guilt all the time!” But we all are being pursued by guilt because we must have an identity and there must be some standard to live up to by which we get that identity. Whatever you base your life on –you have to live up to *that*. Jesus is the one Lord you can live for who died for you–...does that sound oppressive?”

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◆Remember, if you indeed came from God, if Jesus is your Creator –then by definition nothing could ever satisfy you like he can, no matter how hard you try. Cynthia Heimel wrote about all the people she knew in New York City before they became famous move stars. One worked behind the counter at Macy’s, one worked selling tickets at movie theaters and so on. She recalls that when they became successful, every one of them became more angry, manic, unhappy and unstable than they had been on their way to the “top.” She observes that is the inevitable disillusion they experience of the fame that they thought was going to make their lives OK, and bearable, and happy. But when they got there, they were still themselves! We miss God working hard on the way to our little gods! But we don’t notice till we arrive and discover our idol doesn’t fill us up.

◆**Conclusion:** So how are each of us building a “kingdom of me”? What are you banking on to give your life significance? What are you valuing above everything else? Let me quote St. Augustine again who said in prayer to God, “we are restless until we rest in you.” We must learn to say “_____ will never fill my soul.” (Whatever you are pulled toward that isn’t God goes in the blank.)

◆But we have a maker who is also a father. The truth is, he knows us and loves us like the perfect father he is. He relishes our name like the perfect lover. He is incredibly gentle. He will never write you off. Your moral achievement is not why he loves

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you. He is fully aware of what you like and dislike. He notices your new glasses, haircut. When you pray to him, he knows what you mean to say, and nods with understanding. He's not afraid of your grief, or your temper, or you mess ups. He thinks about you, even when you are not praying. He wants to share with you what he thinks, how he feels. He admires and respects you even if you haven't turn 10 yet. He's not bent out of shape or gritting his teeth when you do the wrong thing, even though he is thoroughly against wrong things. Even when he's stern, he's friendly and there is nothing about you that is bigger than his love for you. He is your Prodigal God.