

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

◆**Intro:** What goes through your mind when you here the word “party”? I recall the first and last so-called “party” I went to in college. My roommate and I ventured over to “Jeff’s” house (names have been changed to protect the guilty), a nice suburban mansion of sorts with a full, starkly unfinished basement just a few blocks from campus. Smoke filled that lower dungeon as though to hide your identity. People stood in small clusters all around on the cold cement lower level, holding beer steins or bottles, and standing voiceless under the thundering stereo. In a corner, one particularly intense set of young men pitched pennies into a shot glass on a card table, causing one to wonder if there might be other ways one might relish life. After about 8.5 minutes of being immersed in that basement, my roommate and I decided there were better ways to waste our time.

◆If that’s your idea of a party, you’re gonna be confused when I tell you that God’s family is a partying people. Take the Hebrew folk; now there was a group that knew how to celebrate. Today we attend weddings and afterward we may sit down to a fancy meal of filet mignon, with a wine-tinted gravy, green beans with sliced almonds, champagne, etc. After dinner the bride and groom play around with a cake and then the less self-conscious generations start line-dancing to songs obviously written out west. Somewhere late in the night we filter home, glad to have been with old friends and relatives. But the Hebrews! Their

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

weddings lasted for seven, count them, seven days! I mean how many times can one do the "Chicken dance"? Seven days of feasting, and playing games and renewing acquaintances. That sounds more like a mini vacation to me! How did God's chosen people come to do that I wonder? Well OT Israel had at least seven major national feasts annually! So they come by it honestly. Maybe they got the idea from God! He's a celebrator.

◆ **1. God wants me to celebrate life with him!** You heard me right. Lots of folks think that God is serious and therefore also unemotional. They can't imagine God having a good time. But in reality, *GOD IS THE HAPPIEST BEING IN EXISTENCE!* Joy is a fruit of his Spirit, says Galatians 5! People who think of God as a grouchy disciplinarian don't know him very well (and may have had very unhappy parents.) Did you know that the Bible depicts the day of salvation as a party?

◆ *On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine--the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken." Isaiah 25:6-8, NIV.*

◆ That image is repeated in the book of Revelation. Jesus spoke the same way himself.

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

◆“I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 8:11, NIV.

◆I’m trying to make a case here about how we look at God. Jesus, God’s one and only Son – Jesus, are you ready for this, ...made wine! Now I don’t mean he fermented 25 ounces of Merlo in a skinny bottle. In John 2:6 we read that he turned about 150 gallons of ceremonial washing water into wine! Comedian Michael Jr says that makes him feel sorry for Jesus’ little brother, James. You know some parents have the bad habit of saying things like, “Why can’t you be like your big brother?” Well, he says, can you imagine the pressure on James with Jesus as his big brother? Imagine at the next wedding Jesus’ family goes to, Jesus left early, and then they needed wine? Guess what’s gonna happen? Everybody looks at James, like, “James... We need more wine. Are you just gonna stand there with your sandals on?” Tough spot. Wine in the OT was symbolic of God’s coming in the final days! Jeremiah talks that way. Hosea talks that way. Amos talks that way. Makes ya think. Jesus made wine! God likes a good party.

◆So lets sum it up: God made you and me with the intention of living with him in joy, and abundance. That’s who God really is. He rejoices over us just as there is rejoicing “in heaven” in the three stories of lost things that get found in

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

Luke 15. God is a celebrating, (could we say?) partying God. Salvation itself is the greatest banquet of all, called the Wedding Supper of the Lamb! This is what we must not miss: God rejoices over his children. God rejoices over the repentant sinner. God delights in redemption and restoration.

◆ So often people think of God as BOUNCER AT A BAR who won't let you in unless you're the right type, or GUARD AT THE GATE who is there to keep people out of heaven. Or an INSPECTOR AT THE ENTRANCE who gets his jollies finding something wrong so that you don't pass. No that is not it at all. God is not grouchy and opposed to people. God is supremely happy and desires people!

◆ *"On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Zephaniah 3:16, 17, NIV.*

◆ "the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love." Psalms 147:11

◆ "For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation." Psalms 149:4, NIV.

◆ "As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you." Isaiah 62:5, NIV.

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

◆Do you believe me yet? Years ago, [Bill Cain] took a break from his own ministry to care for his father as he died of cancer. His father had become a frail man, dependent on Bill to do everything for him. Though he was physically not what he had been, and the disease was wasting him away, his mind remained alert and lively. In the role reversal common to adult children who care for their dying parents, Bill would put his father to bed and then read him to sleep, exactly as his father had done for him in childhood. Bill would read from some novel, and his father would lie there, staring at his son, smiling.

◆Bill was exhausted from the day's care and work and would plead with his dad, "Look, here's the idea. I read to you. You fall asleep." Bill's father would impishly apologize and dutifully close his eyes. But this wouldn't last long. Soon enough, Bill's father would pop one eye open and smile at his son. Bill would catch him and whine, "Now, come on." The father would, again, oblige, until he couldn't anymore, and the other eye would open to catch a glimpse of his son. This went on and on, and after his father's death, Bill said that this evening ritual was really a story of a father who just couldn't take his eyes off his kid. How much more so God?

◆Now here's another thing to think about concerning our joyful Father.

◆**2. My Father's desire to celebrate life with me is so great, he initiates & pays the cost himself.** We have to understand something about this love of God. It is first. It comes first. It starts with the Father. He is the initiator. In all the religions of the world it is man who goes looking for God, or heaven, or Nirvana. But the true story is that it doesn't work that way. Man

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

can't find him. Never will, because of sin. God comes looking for us! But lets hold on that a minute to notice ...

◆A. It's my failure, not God's that keeps me from being able to feast with the Father. Remember Adam and Eve, breaking relationship with God, bringing sin into the world, and having to leave home (the Garden)?

◆"And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken." Genesis 3:22, 23, NIV.

◆Sin causes/costs our separation from God's reality. The reason we don't sense the presence of God tangibly in our house every day is because this world and we are tainted by unholiness. Unholiness always leads to that not-at-home feeling! Adam and Eve were now "not home" anymore. Like the younger brother who left. Like the lost older brother who had left in his heart even though he was physically still at the house. In fact we could define sin as the problem that keeps us from being at home with God. This sin, or not-being-home problem pervades all of human kind and keeps us from living the feast of the Father! It is the restlessness in our souls that nothing seems to fill. Augustine spoke of it. Lewis spoke of it. He called it "the scent of a flower we have not yet found, the echo of a tune we have never really heard, news from a country we have never yet visited."

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

Philosopher Martin Heidegger called it “unheimlichkeit”. It’s translated “eeriness” or “uncanniness” but literally it means “away-from-home-ness”. Heidegger is referring to the anxiety and spiritual nausea that comes from never feeling quite perfectly at home in this world.

◆ I want to pause for a moment to emphasize this. If you haven’t yet felt uneasiness in your soul, you will. There will come times for every one of us in the room when, if but for a moment we sense the emptiness of the soul;

unheimlichkeit! When you feel emptiness of the soul (unheimlichkeit), that sense of not being at home, not

knowing what to do with yourself, that restless longing that nothing can fill, may I suggest you don’t reach for your smart phone? The best choice is to turn toward God.

Wherever you are; whatever you’re in -let it make you start seeking God. It is a hint that your heart really needs God and his joyful love more than whatever you are trying at the moment. In the unheimlichkeit moments, start asking him for direction.

◆ There’s just one problem with the emptiness of the soul caused by sin: no one can pay the cost to fix it. So we need to remember a second thing...

◆ **B.** We need to realize that the celebrating God is also the seeking God. God went after mankind! Even at their banishment

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

from God's presence God himself promises to send someone to bring them home!

◆ *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* Genesis 3:15, NIV.

◆ That was God addressing Satan, and promising the Messiah! See, the cost of saving mankind from forever being not-home was paid by God who took the initiative to pursue us! Just like the shepherd in Luke 15 went looking for the one lost sheep. And the woman in Luke 15 went looking for the one lost coin. And the ... wait a minute... Nobody went looking for the lost son in Luke 15! So here the parallelism of the three stories is noticeably thrown off! *That nobody went looking for the younger son is another shock to Jesus' audience!* Know who in their culture would have been expected to go after the foolish younger brother? That's right, the oldest brother who always inherited twice as much as all the rest so that he could lead the family! But he didn't do it! And he doesn't want his brother home. In the same way the Pharisees were not eating with tax-collectors and sinners. They didn't want them to be home and they muttered about Jesus doing it! But that's exactly why Jesus came; to "seek and save the lost". (Lk.19:10) God came looking! Initiating. And he's doing that right now with you!

◆ **C.** The celebrating God is also the suffering God. Some folks don't see the Gospel in the Parable of the Lost Sons. Where is

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

the sin of the younger son paid for? How is atonement made?

It's made by the true Elder Brother here's how:

- ◆1) First Jesus was in fact being the true Elder Brother himself. He was the initiator. The Seeker. The one eating with sinners, right?
- ◆2) And second, in so doing he was absorbing the cost of the younger brothers coming home. See, if younger brother got welcomed back fully into the home (things the feast of veal, the family insignia ring, and the robe all indicate) that means he's once again an heir! He came back empty. Whose clothes is the boy gonna wear? Well, probably his brother's! That means that the elder brother is funding him because everything left in the household was the elder brother's inheritance. The younger boy already spent his!
- ◆And so it is with Jesus himself. Not only did he leave home and heaven to find his brothers and sister. But to get them home he paid the price of their sin with his own life.

◆"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:4-6, NIV.

- ◆There could be no welcoming home of the younger brother without cost to the older brother.

FEAST OF THE FATHER, LK.15:11-32

The Prodigal God #5

◆Conclusion:

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.” Hebrews 2:9-11, NIV.

◆What do you see here? Jesus is the true elder brother who left home to bring back his brothers and sisters at his own expense.

◆Jesus left heaven so we could go to heaven.

◆Jesus was stripped on the cross so we could get a robe of righteousness.

◆Jesus drank the cup of punishment, so we could drink the cup of salvation.

◆Jesus was rejected so we could be accepted.

◆*“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV.*

◆So whatchew gonna do? You just gonna stand there with your sandals on? Accept the Prodigal Father’s invitation. Come into the house, the party, the celebration of life not earned. Come live with the Father.

◆*“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” Revelation 22:17, NIV.*