



**Luke 15:11-16**  
**"The Prodigal Son - Part 1"**  
**By Mike Clark**

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**Luke 15:11-16**

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

INTRODUCTION – Between 1996 and 2011, Nicolas Cage made over 150 million dollars. He was once considered one of Hollywood's highest-paid actors, earning \$40 million in 2009. But he was a big spender and by the time he reached his mid-forties, he spent so much cash that he put the King of Arabia to shame. Let's look at some of the things he spent his money on. They included a dinosaur skull valued at \$300,000, two albino king cobras, two islands in the Bahamas, 30 motorcycles, 50 cars, of which included 9 Rolls Royce's, a half-million-dollar Lamborghini, and a 1 million-dollar Ferrari. He bought 4 yachts, a famous haunted house, shrunken pygmy heads, comic book collections, a crocodile, a shark, an octopus, a Gulfstream jet, 15 homes around the world, 2 European castles, rare art, and high end jewelry. Through all these purchases, he blew through the 150 million, ended up broke and owed the IRS 13 million! How did this happen? This is what a life apart from God does to people.



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You end up squandering everything you have. Nothing ever satisfies. And so, if you have the means you keep buying stuff hoping it will satisfy but you never have enough, because people were made to worship the Lord and find ultimate satisfaction only in Him.

Now in this part of Luke's gospel, Christ is on His way to Jerusalem and he is entering the last months of His life. He is intending to offer Himself as God's perfect sacrifice for sin, die on the cross and then on the following Sunday rise again from the dead, having accomplished our redemption.

He has been ministering now for nearly three years and preaching the message of the kingdom of God and repentance and calling men and women to enter into the kingdom of God through repentance and faith in Him.

But He has some relentless enemies, the Pharisees and the scribes. They basically created the popular religion of Judaism at the time. They had their influence in the synagogues, which were the local assemblies of Jewish people where they came together to be taught. They were the primary influencing force.

They were legalistic, corrupt inwardly, hypocritical, and hostile to Jesus. And yet they had the greatest amount of influence and so you have a population that for the most part is either hostile or indifferent to Jesus under their influence.

And that ultimately comes down upon His head as they scream for His blood in Jerusalem.



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And so that is the occasion that leads to the stories that Jesus tells in Luke 15. In verse 1 it says, "All the tax gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him."

And both the Pharisees and the scribes, who were the theological experts in the Pharisees' movement, began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" And, of course, eating with someone meant affirmation and approval.

And so, they were outraged. They would not associate with these kinds of people. They would not eat with these people by any means. They kept themselves from all of these kinds of people in some self-designed effort to protect their own imagined purity.

Now this sets off an answer from Jesus. And the answer is a simple one. "You don't get it, do you? The reason I associate with these sinners is because I have come to seek and to save that which is lost," as He says explicitly in Luke 19:10. "I do this because it is the Father's joy. It is God's joy to save lost sinners."

This was Pastor Jody's first point last week. This is the character of God – to love and save unworthy sinners. And Pastor Jody also taught us that God not only rejoices in finding those who are lost but that He rejoices with those who are in the kingdom and invites us to be a part of the process.

And last week we saw where Jesus goes on to tell a story about a shepherd who had a 100 sheep and he lost one and went and found it, brought the sheep back, and says, "I tell you in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one



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sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

And that is a sarcastic rebuke of the Pharisees themselves who thought they were righteous and needed no repentance. But Heaven's joy is in the recovery of a lost sinner who repents.

And then He told a second story about a woman who had ten silver coins and lost one and went on a search until it was found. And again, in verse 10, "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

What He is saying to Pharisees and scribes is you are so far from God, you don't even understand what makes God have joy. You don't understand what causes God to be content, satisfied, and joyful. It is the recovery of sinners.

So, the first two stories, about the sheep and the coin, emphasize God as the seeker, the one who finds and the one who rejoices. But the third story looks not so much at the divine side, but at the human side: it looks at sin, repentance, recovery, and rejection. This is a dramatic and moving story.

**POINT 1 – Be careful what you ask for because God may give it.**

**<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.**

Now in verse 11, at the beginning of the parable, the man is represented as God who has two sons, which represent two kinds of people, those who are self-righteous and those who are unrighteous.



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Jesus implies to the Pharisees and scribes that these publicans and sinners, whom they despised, were their brothers, partakers of the same nature, and therefore they ought to be glad of any kindness shown to them.

Verse 12 is an absolutely outrageous statement. It's pretty bad when people look at God's gifts as debts. Like "You owe me!"

Reminds me of Sally in Charlie Brown when she is having Charlie Brown write a letter to Santa and says "please note the size and color of each item and send as many as possible. If it seems too complicated make it easy on yourself, just send money, how about 10's and 20's." And Charlie Brown tosses the letter in disgust and Sally says, "All I want is what's coming to me, all I want is my fair share." 😊

Now the younger son is completely disrespectful toward his father is asking this. He lacks any love for his father whatsoever. There is not an ounce of gratitude in his heart for his father.

In fact, the truth of the matter is for a son to say that in the sensibilities of the ancient Middle East in village life would be tantamount to saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead. You are in the way of my plans and you are a barrier. I want my freedom. I want my fulfillment and I want out of this family now.

I've got other plans and they don't involve you. They don't involve this family. I want nothing to do with any of you. I want my inheritance now." Which is equal to saying: "I wish you were dead."

This was a culture where honor was so important, a culture that was based upon the commandment to "Honor your father and your mother."



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The way it worked was you never got your inheritance until your father died. But to do this, to ask for it at this point essentially was not only to affirm that your father was dead, but was also to commit suicide, because anybody would expect that that kind of request of a father would be responded to with a slap across the face.

And then very likely he would be shamed publicly and perhaps dispossessed of everything he had and perhaps even considered as dead and dismissed from the family.

That's how serious the breach was and that is why in verse 24 when he comes back, the father says, "This son of mine was dead." And he says it again in verse 32 to the older brother, "This brother of yours was dead."

Now when he says, "give me the share of property," he uses the word "estate." The word in the Greek is *τῆς οὐσίας*, and is used only here and it means the goods, the property, the portion. He's asking for the material stuff; land, animals, buildings, whatever family possessions he is entitled to get.

And in a two-brother family, according to Deuteronomy 21:17, the estate would be divided unequally. The older son gets double what the younger son gets. That means two-thirds go to the older son, one-third goes to the younger son. So, whatever was one-third of everything that this family had is what he wants.

And they must have had a lot. They had servants, as we find out later in the story. They may have hired musicians and dancers for the party. They had animals, including a fattened calf. And they must have had a substantial enough



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estate that he thought if he could get his third, he could fund his rebellion pretty well.

But all he wanted was the τῆς οὐσίας, and that's a very important word because the normal word for "inheritance" is κληρονομία. That's the normal word. And when you use that word and you talk about inheritance, you're talking about everything that comes with the material.

You're talking about the management of the estate, leadership, and responsibility to provide the resources for the family.

When you receive your inheritance from your father, you literally are receiving the responsibility to manage all the assets of the estate on behalf of the family, and then to add to that, and build the estate for the family in the future. So, with the word "inheritance" comes responsibility, accountability for the future.

But he didn't want any of that, so he didn't use that word. Jesus put this word, τῆς οὐσίας, in his mouth, "I just want my stuff. I don't want leadership or responsibility, or accountability, I don't want anything for the future.

I'm not taking on any responsibility for this family now or ever again. I don't want to care for anyone. I just want my stuff. No leadership, no responsibility, no accountability, no part of the family, no part of the father's future."

All of this indicates that he is living under the father's authority very reluctantly. He is miserable. He wants freedom and independence. He wants



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distance, he wants to go as far away from all restraint, all accountability that he can.

He doesn't want to obey his father or be directed by his father or have to answer to his father. He wants nothing to do with anybody who knows him. He wants out, but he wants out with all that he can get to finance his leaving.

This is the original apostasy of mankind. People don't want to be tied up to God's commandments. This is the great foolishness of sinners, which ruins them - being content to have their portion in this lifetime, to receive their good things. They look only at the things that are seen, things that are temporary, and only want a present gratification, but have no care for the next life.

Now look again at the last part of verse 12 and this is the first surprise in the story. "And he divided his wealth between them."

He divided his wealth. You know what the word "wealth" is in the Greek? *Bios*, life, biology, this is their life, their livelihood. This is what the family's life for generations has produced. This is his living. This is his source of livelihood.

For a father to do this was very shocking and this would cause another gasp from the Pharisees and scribes.

Rather than strike him across the face for his disrespect and audacity, the father grants him what he wants. He extends to him this freedom because he is willing to endure the agony of rejected love.

You know the greater the love, the greater the pain when that love is rejected. This is God. This is God giving the sinner his freedom.





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The sinner has no relationship to God whatsoever. He doesn't love God, he doesn't care about God, he wants nothing to do with God, nothing to do with the family of God, wants nothing to do with the future of the family of God, wants no accountability to God, wants no interest in God, doesn't want to answer to God, doesn't want to submit to God, doesn't want any kind of relationship at all.

And God, in the agony of rejected love, lets the sinner go. It's like Romans 1, He gave them over.

**POINT 2 – It's not always a good thing to get what you always wanted.**

**<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.**

He leaves quickly. He didn't wait long, he couldn't wait. He's waited long enough. I imagine it also would be uncomfortable to be around there for very long with possibly guilt hanging over your head.

He's sick of being in the father's presence. He's sick of having any accountability or relationship with the family. He has no love for his father. He has absolutely no love for his older brother either and his older brother has no love for him.

This is the foolishness of the sinner. He wants to get away from God. He wants to get away from God now.

**Psalm 73:27 – "For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;  
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you."**



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The prodigal son wants no accountability to God. He sells cheap all of the opportunities that God has provided for him, all the good gifts, all the gospel opportunities, everything that's good that God has put into his world.

All that goodness and forbearance of God that's meant to lead him into a relationship with God he spurns and once he gets his cash, you see what happens - "He went on a journey into a distant country."

And Gentile land would be distant country. Any country outside Israel is Gentile land. He went to a Gentile land, which was another horror.

And there he is free to sear his conscience and let the pleasures of sin stomp out any feelings of guilt. Yes, sin can be pleasurable. It may be sweet to the taste, but in the end become bitter with its consequences as we'll soon see.

So, the younger son is as bad as anybody could be. You can't be worse than to scorn and dishonor your father. And you add to that materialistic greed. And you add to that selling off the generational family estate. And you add to that going into a Gentile land far away, so nobody knows or cares what you do. This is outrageous conduct.

And it says he squandered his property. "Squandered" means to scatter. He just threw it away. He wasted it; on loose living, reckless living, wasteful living: ζῶν ἀσώτως, in the Greek, which means a dissipated life, a debauched life, a depraved life, a dissolute life. In fact, down in verse 30, his older brother says, "He devoured his wealth with harlots." Proverbs 5 warns about this.



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Proverbs 5:8-14 –“ Keep your way far from her,  
and do not go near the door of her house,  
<sup>9</sup>lest you give your honor to others  
and your years to the merciless,  
<sup>10</sup>lest strangers take their fill of your strength,  
and your labors go to the house of a foreigner,  
<sup>11</sup>and at the end of your life you groan,  
when your flesh and body are consumed,  
<sup>12</sup>and you say, “How I hated discipline,  
and my heart despised reproof!  
<sup>13</sup>I did not listen to the voice of my teachers  
or incline my ear to my instructors.  
<sup>14</sup>I am at the brink of utter ruin  
in the assembled congregation.”

Now obviously this young son represents open sinners, the rebels, the debauched, the immoral, those who make no pretense of faith in God, no pretense of love for God. This is those in verse 1. This is the tax gatherers and the sinners, the outcasts, the irreligious.

And they run as far as they can from God because they have no love for Him and no relationship with Him. They don't want anything to do with His law or His rule. They don't want any accountability to Him whatsoever. They don't darken the door of the church. They're not interested in exposing themselves to anybody's expectations.



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But sin never works out the way it looks. Verse 14 says "when he had spent everything." That kind of introduces the fact that when he arrived in the far country, he was the fat cat, the new guy in town with a lot of money.

He comes into town and sets himself on the party trail and goes on a wild spree, collecting around him all kinds of people who wanted to cash in on his foolish generosity. He surrounds himself with the riff-raff and the scum and the lowlifes and he runs out of money. He spends everything.

Then a famine arose. Not a famine of a minor nature, a severe famine.

Remember, for example, the times when Israel was under siege and the famine would be so bad that people would do what? - Women ate their afterbirth and even cannibalized their children. That's a severe famine!

Severe famines of history involve children being sold into slavery to keep them from starving, people would be found dead every morning on the streets, men venturing out at night unarmed were attacked and eaten.

Straying animals were killed and eaten raw. Shoe leather, rotten flesh and garbage were all devoured. That is a severe famine!

And that would be the picture in the minds of the listeners to Jesus when He told the story. You're talking about a level of desperation that's beyond anything we can conceive of.

And now he has no family. He has nobody left. He's in a foreign land, nowhere to turn. All his resources are gone. He is destitute. He is on skid row. He is penny-less.



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For the first time he can't supply what he needs.

Proverbs 21:17 - <sup>17</sup> Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man;  
he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

23:19-21 - <sup>19</sup> Hear, my son, and be wise,  
and direct your heart in the way.

<sup>20</sup> Be not among drunkards  
or among gluttonous eaters of meat,

<sup>21</sup> for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,  
and slumber will clothe them with rags.

28:7 - The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding,  
but a companion of gluttons shames his father.

29:3 - He who loves wisdom makes his father glad,  
but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.

POINT 3 – Just when you think it can't get any worse....it does.

<sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

He went to one of the citizens of that country out of desperation, trying to figure out what he is going to do. This is typical of the sinner. He runs from God, goes out, lives a rebellious life, sins up a storm, winds up in the pit, with absolutely



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nothing, and is completely bankrupt. He has nothing, but he tries to pick himself up because he was facing death.

"Citizen" is a word that refers to a privileged person. He found somebody who had some means and it says he "attached himself to him." That's a great word in the Greek, *kollaō*, to glue. He stuck himself to this guy.

The picture here is of a man who is now a beggar. And it says in verse 15, that he sent him into his fields to feed pigs. This isn't really a job. It's the lowest possible thing that anybody could ever do.

And at this point the gasp is louder than ever. This is a Jewish boy feeding pigs in a Gentile land, serving a Gentile. Leviticus 11:7, Deuteronomy 14:8 and other Old Testament passages indicate that Jews could not eat pork which were unclean animals. And he ends up feeding pigs. "Go feed my pigs." This is lower than low can be.

And he's trying to crowd in with the pigs to get the slop. That's what it's saying. He was so hungry that he was not just feeding pigs and earning wages; he was trying to eat their food and battle them for it.

Now the pods are carob pods. It's a bitter black berry that sometimes the pigs ate off a bush, but was also taken and collected and then molasses was extracted from the carob pods and the pulp that was left from that was thrown to the pigs. So, what he's doing is very likely eating the pulp from carob pods with the pigs.



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And here is this Jewish son out there and the unbelievable reality is that he's a pig. He's not with them; he's one of them, only wishing that he was better at getting food; in the Greek - ἐπεθύμειω, longing, strong desire.

Speaking of those who worship idols, **Isaiah 44:20** – “He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself.”

Hosea 12:1 – talks about feeding on the wind. You can't get anything!

He is in great need now – physically and spiritually. He is possibly starving to death as he longs to eat pig food. Notice it says, “No one gave him anything.” Most were probably struggling as well in this famine, so he probably wasn't alone in this kind of condition.

What would it be like to have no one give you anything? Can you imagine that? Asking everyone around for crumbs and no one gives you anything.

**Psalm 142:4** – “Look to the right and see:

there is none who takes notice of me;  
no refuge remains to me;  
no one cares for my soul.”

**Matthew 13:12** – “<sup>12</sup> For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

Matthew Henry said, “Willful waste brings woeful want, Riotous living in time, perhaps in a little time, brings men to a morsel of bread.”



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You cannot even begin to understand the highbrow, elitist sensitivities of the Pharisees and the scribes imagining any Jewish young man doing this. It is unthinkable.

This is the greatest tragedy that they could ever conceive of. This is the greatest rebellion, the greatest breach, the greatest waste of a life, the greatest waste of an opportunity. This is the most despicable kind of conduct that they could conceive.

And that was the point. And now he's starving to death. This is desperation. This is the sinner, poor, hungry, hopeless, trying to get a little pig slop; nobody to help; nobody to pity him.

But that is not the end. We'll see the repentance of this younger son and the incredible love the Father has for his son which shows us the amazing love God has for his children.

And you think about this – we were all once like this prodigal to one degree or another.

Ephesians 2:1-3 - And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”





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Titus 3:3 **"<sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another."**

Sometimes the Lord gives people over to their sin and lets them have what they want, and they end up hitting rock bottom. And sometimes that is what it takes to wake some people up before they realize their ultimate need, and that is a Savior to rescue them from their sins.

This may be your story or the story of someone you know. And we can pray for our lost loved ones and friends, asking the Lord to bring them to the end of themselves so that they will cry out to God and be saved.

But listen to the great love and mercy of God and what he has done for us.

**1 Cor 6:9-11 – "<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.**

**<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."**

**Ephesians 2:13 – "<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."**

Unlike the Pharisees and the scribes, Jesus came and rescued prodigal sons and daughters, the lost, the tax collectors and sinners, both Jews and Gentiles. He took all the sin, all the running away from God and the breaking of his



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commandments, our failing to love God and our neighbor as ourselves, he took all that and bore it on the cross for us.

And then he gives, those who repent and trust in Him alone, his perfect life, the life that never once broke any of God's commandments, never once ran from His father's will and always loved His Father and loved to do His will and loved his neighbor as himself. That's the gospel!

**2 Corinthians 5:21 – "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."**

**Luke 19:10 – "<sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

We were once dead, but now are alive! God rejoices at the conversion of sinners, yes even great sinners.

So, in light of the depths that God has gone to, may we out of gratitude, go into all the world and preach the gospel: To our neighbors, our family members, our friends, our co-workers. Jesus said, "Freely you have received, now freely give." We have received God's grace; may we now freely give the gospel to those who desperately need it and may we ever praise the Lord for his great mercy! Amen.