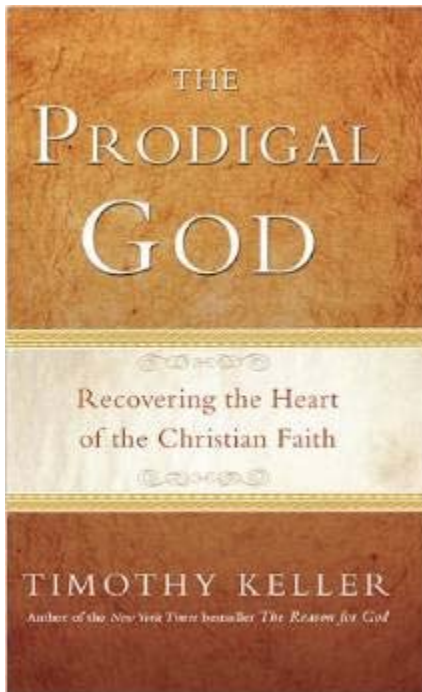
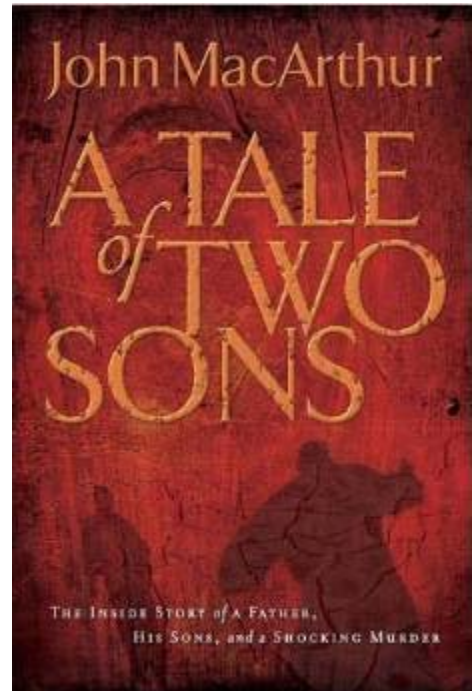


Sessions 1-3 / 54 minutes.



I consider it an honor and a privilege to be standing here before you. I pray that your knowledge and faith might be strengthened.

I would like to take a moment to speak on the inspiration for this message. My wife drug me into a book store. Generally I decide what books I want and I order them on line. While I was waiting for her to do her book shopping I found myself listening to a conversation between the salesman and a customer who wanted a book, about the parable of the



Prodigal Son, for a speech that she was about to deliver. The salesman's response convicted me. His response was, when a writer writes a book, he means what he says. He puts a lot of work into how he expresses his thoughts. When we take his text, and say this is what his text means to me, and then go on to explain what the text means to us, we do a disservice to the writer. Particularly, when we do this without giving due consideration to what the writer said, the text meant to him. In this case the writer is Jesus. After reading the book, the salesman's meaning, leaped off the pages. Make no mistake, I am not saying that this is what Jesus's text meant to the author of the book. After all what makes the author an authority. After reading the book I know that this is what Jesus's text meant to Jesus. A quote from Jesus is "He who receives him that I sent, receives me". Jesus sent the author, Timothy Keller, at least relative to his knowledge on this parable. Knowledge discovered is far more powerful then knowledge given. Keller was not a lazy reader. He had to prayerfully work to get the understanding from the parable that he received.

This message will be taken from Luke 15, which is commonly referred to as, the Parable Of The Prodigal Son. I hope to shine some light on what the author, Jesus, ment by this parable. Particularly, what contributions the elder son brings to the story, which is almost always left out of interpretations of the parable.

The first two parables are about a lost coin and a lost sheep, and their helplessness in finding themselves, thus their need of a savior to find them.

By listening carefully to all three parables, and especially to the last one, traditionally called The Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus challenges his listeners' fundamental assumptions about God, sin, and salvation. He gives them an entirely new way of thinking about God, themselves, and the whole

world. Now we will move to the last of these three parables, the parable of the lost son, because I really want to get to what contributions the elder son brings to the story.

The title of this session of this parable is:

Give Me My Share.

My text is taken from Luke 15:12, and 20-24. First I will introduce the text.

The third of Jesus's three parables is the longest and most famous. It is a story about a family, a father, an older son, and a younger son. The story begins when the younger son comes to the father and says, "Give me my share of the estate." In ancient times, when the father died, the oldest son always got "a double portion" of what any other child got. If there are two sons, the older would get two-thirds of the estate and so the younger would get one-third. So the story opens with the younger son asking for his one-third share of the inheritance.

Let us look at:

1) the meaning of the request, 2) the response to that request, and 3) what difference it makes for us.

-- The First Issue In This Session "Give Me My Share", Is:...The meaning of the request.

Let us look at verses 11-12.

- Here begineth the reading of God's Holy Word.

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

- Here endeth the reading of God's Holy Word.

- The younger son's request was stunning, because the inheritance, of course, was not divided up and distributed to the children until the father died.
- As Kenneth Bailey writes: "In Middle Eastern culture, to ask for the inheritance while the Father is alive, is to wish him dead."
- The request would therefore have been a disgrace to the family name, because of the younger son's extraordinary disrespect for his father. It would have also been a blow to the economic standing of the family, since the father would have to sell part of his estate in order to give him his share.
- In short, this request ripped the family apart. It was a relational and economic act of violence against the family's integrity.
- Why would the younger son make such a request?
- Our hearts are distorted by "dis-ordered loves." We love, and look to things to give us the joy and meaning that only the Lord can give.
- The younger son may have lived with his father and may even have obeyed his father, but he did not love his father. The thing he loved, ultimately, was his father's things, not his father. His heart was set on the wealth and on the comfort, freedom and status that wealth brings.

His father was just a means to an end. Now, however, his patience was over. He knew that the request would be like a knife in his father's heart, but he obviously did not care.

- Here is a great irony, which we will return to later.
- The two sons look very different, on the surface. One runs off and lives a dissolute life, one stays home and obeys and serves his father.
- Yet at the end, we will see that the two sons are more alike than they are different.

-- The Second Issue In This Session "Give Me My Share", Is:... The response to the request.
Let us look at verses 12, and 20-24.

- Here begineth the reading of God's Holy Word.

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

- Here endeth the reading of God's Holy Word.

- The younger son's request to the father would have shocked Jesus's listeners, but the father's response is even more remarkable. This was a patriarchal society, in which you were required to show respect and reverence toward those older or above you. This kind of contempt and insolence would have ordinarily met with outrage. The listeners would expect the father to explode in wrath, to drive the son out with blows.

- Instead, we read the simple words, "so he divided his property between them." We need to put ourselves into the historical context. In those days, most of a family's wealth was in their land and property. Indeed, their family land was part of their very identity. It is likely that the father had to sell some of his land in order to become "liquid" and give his younger son his share.

- This is reflected in the unusual Greek word for living used in verse 12 translated as "property." It is the word "bios" which means "life." It says, literally, he divided his "life" between them. Why use that word? Probably it was a way to convey what it felt like for the father to lose his land, his family's good name and status, and the presence of one of his two sons. The father is being asked to tear his very life apart, and he does.

- The older son and anyone else in the community would have thought that the father was being foolish to give in to the younger son's request. But looking back, we know better. If the father had become embittered, and had perhaps beaten the young man or done something else severe to him, no restoration would have ever happened. The father's heart would have been too hardened to ever receive him back, and the son may never have expected or wanted the father to do so.

- By bearing the agony and pain of the son's sin himself, instead of taking revenge, instead of paying the son back by inflicting pain on him, the father kept the door open in the relationship. The father was willing to suffer for the sin of the child, so that some day reconciliation would be possible.

-- The Third Issue In This Session "Give Me My Share", Is:... What difference it makes for us.

- First, it means that whether we are ir-religious, free-wheeling, "younger brother" types or moral, religious "elder brother" types, we have a problem with, what is sometimes called, "idols of the heart."
- For example, imagine a wife who has a husband who spends hours with another woman talking about all his and her problems, and he goes traveling with this other woman, and talks and thinks about her incessantly. So the wife confronts her husband and he says, "What's the problem? I married you, didn't I? I pay the mortgage, don't I? I do all my duties, don't I? If someone asks, I say you are my wife. Why are you so upset?" The wife will say (rightly) that someone else has captured his heart and imagination.

- Many of us are like the elder brother. We may obey all the rules, but our real heart and passion is something else, our career, or making money, or our children, or peer acceptance. If any thing has a controlling position in our heart, if any thing is more important to our happiness than God, then that thing is a "god" to us, an "idol of the heart."

- Recognize these things for what they are. Do you see them in your own heart and life? Once we see these things for what they are, what can be done about them?

- Secondly, it means that our Lord has done for us what the father in the parable did for his son.

- When God came into this world, we would have expected him to come in wrath, to appear and drive us out with blows. But he did not. He didn't come with a sword in his hand, but with nails in his hands. He didn't come to bring judgment, but to bear our judgment.

- Jesus went to the cross in weakness, and there, voluntarily, his life was literally torn apart. And for his only property left, his garment, they cast lots. But he did it so that, when we repent, like the younger son, forgiveness and reconciliation is now available.

- And how does this help us with our "disordered loves"? It means there is real, true forgiveness for them. Our guilt is dealt with by Jesus's blood. When we see the absolute beauty of what Jesus has done for us, it captures our hearts. Money can not die for us, popularity can not die for us. There is nothing more beautiful in all of reality than the picture of a perfectly happy Being, leaving all the bliss of heaven, and sacrificing everything for the sake of rebellious, undeserving, ungrateful people. The more you look at Jesus doing that, the more you will love him above anyone or anything else. He will capture your heart so that nothing matters more than he does. In conclusion of session two, when you see what he has done for you, it makes the worst times bearable and the best times leavable.

The title of this session of this parable is:

The Elder Brother.

My text is taken from Luke 15:25-32. Let me introduce the text.

Now this is the part that I want to lift up. Most people who read and study The Parable of the Prodigal Son concentrate completely on the character of the younger son, his repentance, and the father's forgiveness. And yet look at the text. It doesn't end with the return of the prodigal. Almost half of the story is about the older son. The story is about two sons, who are both alienated from the father, who are both assaulting the unity of the family. Jesus wants us to compare and contrast them. The younger son is "lost", that is easy to see. We see him shaming his father, ruining his family, sleeping with

prostitutes, and we say, "yes, there's someone who is spiritually lost." But Jesus' point is that the older son is lost too. Let us learn from the text:

- 1) a startling new understanding of lostness,
- 2) what the signs of it are (so we can recognize it in ourselves), and
- 3) what we can do about this condition.

-- The First Issue In This Session "The Elder Brother" Is:... A startling new understanding of lostness. Let us look at verses 25-28. Emphasis on verse 28.

- Here begineth the reading of God's Holy Word.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.

- Here endeth the reading of God's Holy Word.

- The elder brother would have known that the day of the prodigal's return was the greatest day in his father's life.
- The father has "killed the fattened calf", a very expensive luxury in a culture, where even having meat at meals was considered a delicacy.
- The older son realized his father was ecstatic with joy. Yet he refused to go into the biggest feast his father has ever put on. This was a remarkable, deliberate act of disrespect. It was his way of saying, "I will not be part of this family nor respect your headship of it."
- And the father had to "go out" to plead with him. Just as he went out to bring his alienated younger son into the family, now he had to do the same for the older brother.
- Do you realize what Jesus is saying to his listeners, and to us? The older son is lost.
- The father represents God himself, and the meal is the feast of salvation. In the end, then, the younger son, the immoral man, comes in and is saved, but the older son, the good son, refuses to go in and is lost.
- The Pharisees who were listening to this parable knew what that meant. It was a complete reversal of everything they believed. You can almost hear them gasp as the story ends.
- And what is it that is keeping the elder brother out? It is because: "All these years I have been slaveing for you and never disobeyed." (verse 29). The good son is not lost in spite of his good behavior, but because of his good behavior. So it is not his sin keeping him out, but his self-righteousness.
- Why is the older son lost?
- The younger brother wanted the father's wealth, but not the father. So how did he get what he wanted? He left home. He broke the moral rules.
- But it becomes evident by the end, that the elder brother also wanted selfish control of the father's wealth. He was very unhappy with the father's use of the possessions, the robe, the ring, the calf. But while the younger brother got control by taking his stuff and running away, we see that the elder brother got control by staying home and being very good. He felt that now he has the right to tell the father what to do with his possessions because he had obeyed him perfectly.

- So there are two ways to be your own Savior and Lord.
- One is by breaking all the laws and being bad. The other, is by keeping all the laws and being good.
- If I can be so good that God has to answer my prayer, give me a good life, and take me to heaven, then in all I do, I may be looking to Jesus to be my helper and my rewarder, but he isn't my Savior. I am then my own Savior.
- The difference between a religious person and a true Christian is that the religious person obeys God to get control over God, and things from God, but the Christian obeys just to get God, just to love and please and draw closer to him.

-- The Second Issue In This Session "The Elder Brother" Is:... What the signs of this lostness are. Let us look at verses 29-30.

- Here begineth the reading of God's Holy Word.

29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

- Here endeth the reading of God's Holy Word.

Some people are complete elder brothers. They go to church and obey the Bible, but out of expectation, that then God owes them. They have never understood the Biblical gospel at all. But many Christians, who know the gospel, are nonetheless elder-brotherish. Despite the fact that they know the gospel of salvation by grace with their heads, their hearts go back to an elder-brotherish "default mode" of self-salvation. Here is what the elder-brotherish attitude looks like. It is:

- A deep anger ("And he was angry, and would not go in"). Elder brothers believe that God owes them a comfortable and good life if they try hard and live up to standards, and they have! So they say: "my life ought to be going really well!" and when it does not they get angry. But they are forgetting Jesus. He lived a better life than any of us, but suffered terribly.
- A joyless and mechanical obedience ("I have been slaveing for you"). Elder brothers obey God as a means to an end, as a way to get the things they really love. Of course, obedience to God is sometimes extremely hard. But elder brothers find obedience virtually always a joyless, mechanical, slavish thing as a result.
- A coldness to younger brother-types ("this son of yours"). The older son will not even "own" his brother. Elder brothers are too disdainful of others unlike themselves to be effective in evangelism. Elder brothers, who pride themselves on their doctrinal and moral purity, unavoidably feel superior to those who do not have these things.
- A lack of assurance of the father's love ("you never threw me a party). As long as you are trying to earn your salvation by controlling God through your goodness, you will never be sure you have been good enough. What are the signs of this? Every time something goes wrong in your life you wonder if it is a punishment. Another sign is ir-resolvable guilt. You can not be sure you have repented deeply enough, so you beat yourself up over what you did. Lastly, there is a lack of any sense of intimacy with God in your prayer life. You may pray a lot of prayers asking for things, but not sense his love.
- An unforgiving, judgmental spirit . The elder brother does not want the father to forgive the younger brother. It is impossible to forgive someone if you feel "I would never do anything that bad!" You have to be something of an elder brother to refuse to forgive.

-- The Third Issue In This Session "The Elder Brother" Is:... What we can do about this spiritual condition.

Let us look at verses 31-32.

- Here begineth the reading of God's Holy Word.

31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

- Here endeth the reading of God's Holy Word.

- First, we have to see the uniqueness of the gospel.
- Jesus ends the parable with the lostness of the older brother in order to get across the point that it is a more dangerous spiritual condition. The younger brother knew he was alienated from the father, but the elder brother did not.
- If you tell moral, religious people who are trying to be good, trying to obey the Bible so God will bless them, that they are alienated from God, they will just be offended. If you know you are sick you may go to a doctor; if you do not know you are sick you will not, you will just die.
- Moralistic religion works on the principle, "I obey, therefore God accepts me." The gospel works on the principle, "I am accepted by God through Jesus Christ, therefore I obey."
- These are two radically different, even opposite, dynamics. Yet both sets of people sit in church together, both pray, both obey the Ten Commandments, but for radically different reasons. And because they do these things for radically different reasons, they produce radically different results, different kinds of character. One produces anger, joyless compliance, superiority, insecurity, and a condemning spirit. The other slowly but inevitably produces contentment, joy, humility, poise, and a forgiving spirit.
- John 14:15 says "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Is this saying, if you keep my commandments that will cause you to love me? No! This was not the case with the elder brother? The elder brother did not love his father, although he kept his father's commandments (All these years I have been slaveing for you and never disobeyed). The elder brother loved the father's things.

On the other hand is John 14:15 saying if you love me, it will cause you to keep my commandments. Yes! Which comes first, the chicken or the egg. Which comes first loving me, or keeping my commandments? This parable is saying that loving me comes first.

The way that many Christians have interpreted this verse is an example of spiritual dyslexia, (that is a disorder, that can cause a seeming reversal of words when reading). Jesus did not say that keeping his commandments would cause us to love him, but rather loving Him would cause us to keep His commandments. The elder son kept the father's commandments.

- If you call younger brothers to receive Christ and live for him without making this distinction clear, they will automatically think you are inviting them to become elder brothers.
- Second, we have to see the vulnerability of Jesus.
- Remember, again, whom Jesus is speaking to. Jesus is speaking to his mortal enemies, the men he knows will kill him. On the one hand, this is an astonishingly bold challenge to them. He is talking to those who want to kill him and telling them that they are lost, that they misunderstand God's salvation and purpose in the world.

- But at the same time, he is also being so loving and tender. When the father comes out to the older brother, that is Jesus pleading with his enemies. He is urging them to see their fatal error. Jesus does not scream at his enemies, or smite them, but lovingly urges them to repent and come into his love.
- And so we have a foreshadowing of that great moment on the cross when he says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing". This love toward his enemies made him vulnerable and cost him his life. On the cross, instead of blasting his enemies, he lovingly took the penalty of their sins on himself. While we were his enemies, Christ died for us.
- Knowing what he did for us must drain us of our self-righteousness and our insecurity. We were so sinful he had to die for us. But we were so loved that he was glad to die for us. In conclusion, that takes away both the pride and the fear that makes us elder brothers.