

## November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008

### “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 24”

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**Luke 15:11-12**

**11 Then [Jesus] 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 falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Jesus is in the home stretch of His preaching ministry and, as He comes to the close of His earthly life, the major theme of His teaching is His most important one, that being, our eligibility for entrance into Heaven. In our last lesson, I tried to make the point that it is essential for us to recognize that we are all sinners, that none of us is worthy to enter heaven, and that we are saved, not by our own righteousness, but by the sacrifice, the grace gift of the death Jesus Christ on the cross, which pays the penalty that we owe for and atones for the sins that we have committed. Jesus begins the third consecutive parable on this essential topic with the first verse of our text for today, **Luke 15:11:**

**11 Then [Jesus] said: “A certain man had two sons.**

Jesus, in this declaration, is going to deal with the two ways in which human beings approach the problem of acquiring entrance into heaven. In the parable, each of the sons is going to take a different path. The younger of the two begins by making a request of his father. **Luke 15:12** records:

**12 And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood.**

In the normal case, a Jewish estate was divided for purposes of inheritance into  $x+1$  shares, with  $x$  representing the number of sons. Every son receives a share of the estate except for the oldest son, who received two shares. You may remember the story of Jacob and Esau and how Esau traded his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew, in Genesis chapter 25. The birthright of the oldest son is the second share of the inheritance. **Deuteronomy 21:17** says: **17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.**

In the parable that we are studying, the father was not expecting to die, and so rather than giving his son as an inheritance, he divided his livelihood with his son, meaning that he gave his

son goods in anticipation that his son would use the value of that which the father gave him to support himself on a long term basis. The son's request for his "portion of the goods" implied that the son planned to go off on his own and make his way. Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, tells us, in **Ecclesiastes 5:18-19**:

**18 Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.**

**19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.**

Solomon links riches and wealth with labor. To understand God's perspective on that which we acquire, we have to look at the nature of God's creation.

Every living thing that God created has both a continual need for sustenance and the ability to reproduce itself. However, nothing that God created can reproduce itself instantly. Every plant and animal undergoes a period of gestation and labor after which the offspring is born. Birth is followed by a period of development in which the offspring is protected because it is immature, but the offspring labors to grow and develop. This period of development is followed by a period of maturity, in which the offspring acquires the capacity for adult labor and reproduction, and the offspring continues the cycle. Things in nature are not born fully grown, but develop maturity over time.

Human beings similarly develop maturity. We begin with a period of primary and secondary education, analogous to the gestation period, in which we acquire the basic skills that allow us to function in the workplace. Then, analogous to the period of immaturity, we go to a more specialized form of education, that being either vocational school or college, in which we develop the specific skills that will allow us to bear fruit in our particular chosen profession. Once the period of specialized education is completed, we move on to a period of maturity, in which we actually labor to produce fruit, the fruit being both the income that we derive from our labor and our physical offspring. Once we produce offspring, we must continue to labor, that we might have both the physical resources to support the needs of our family and the intellectual resources required to train our offspring to continue the cycle.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us that God plans that we acquire riches and maturity over time by our continued labor, be it physical or intellectual. We mature by laboring cyclically, by doing things over and over again, going to work week after week. God has so designed our environment that it functions on a cycle.

Our immature offspring do not understand the cycle, but are simply acquisition oriented. A teenager in a certain household wanted to acquire a video game that his mother decided was not appropriate for him. In his immaturity, he challenged his mother's decision. "Mom", he said, "those ratings don't really mean anything. Everybody has this game, and I really want to get it."

"Sorry, son", his mother replied, "you can't have it."

"Mom", the boy persisted, "can I have it if I buy it with my own money?"

"What money is that?" Mom queried.

"I have some money from shoveling snow and I still have some birthday money left", responded her son.

“Sit down, dear”, said the mother, “Let me explain some things to you. First of all, you need to understand that I am put on this earth to help you grow and mature. I am put here because you are not mature enough to take care of yourself. You make decisions based upon your feelings, upon what you want and what you see that other people have. My job is to teach you to make better decisions based upon principles and facts rather than feelings and peer pressure. The fact is that what you see and hear affects the way that you think, which is why we send you to school. The longer you see and hear something, the more it affects you. When you spend hours playing a game that broadcasts antisocial messages, the messages of the game affect the way that you think. Children should not play games that send out antisocial messages until they are mature enough to resist the messages that the game is sending out. You aren’t mature enough to handle the message, so you can’t have the game.

Now, as far as your money is concerned, you don’t really have any money. Your Dad and I allow you to carry some money around so that you can get practice making decisions about how to spend it, but the only people that really have money are people that earn their own money and take care of themselves. Let me ask you. Did you enjoy the food at the restaurant to which we went yesterday?

“Yes, ma’am” said the boy.

“Did you pay your portion of the bill?” ask the mother?

“No, Mom”, said the boy, “Dad paid.”

“Well”, said the mother, “when you start paying all of your own bills with money that you earn yourself, you can buy anything that you want with any money that you have left over. But as long as you are living here and your father and I are paying for your housing, your food, and your health insurance and all of the other things that it takes to support you, all of the money that comes into this house belongs to your Dad and me. Occasionally we just let you hold money so that you can get some practice. But even if you go out and earn money shoveling snow, that money is not yours because you owe us for taking care of all of your needs. Now son, your Dad and I love you, and we want you to be happy. It’s just that you can’t really be happy until you have more maturity, can appreciate the things that you have, and can use them for the correct purpose.”

The purpose of life and the key to happiness is the development of maturity, not the acquisition of possessions. Immature people can have a temporary feeling of physical or emotional satisfaction, but they can not truly be happy until have matured enough to understand the plan of God for their lives. Paul testifies to us, in **Philippians 4:11-13**:

**11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:**

**12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.**

**13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

The younger son in the Biblical parable lived a luxurious life with his father at home, but he was not happy, because he was not mature enough to understand the benefits that he was receiving. This is true because, generally speaking, immature people see the purpose of life as the acquisition of possessions, and possessions dissatisfy rather than satisfy. Let me explain to you what this means.

Understand that possessions are cyclical. Whatever you buy is designed to become obsolete soon after you buy it. In order for the company that sold it to you to stay in business, they have to produce another model of their product that is sufficiently different from the model that they sold you to make you dissatisfied with the one you have and motivate you to buy another. A few years ago, I bought a 65" high definition television set upon which to enjoy movies with my wife. The resolution of the screen is as high as resolution comes but the television set uses a method to refresh the picture on the screen known as interlacing. A couple of years ago, television manufacturers started making high definition television sets that use the progressive method to refresh the screen, which allows the screen to refresh at twice the rate of interlaced televisions. So, because of an advance in technology, my 65" high definition television set has become technically obsolete.

The commercials that I see are trying to convince me that I need a new television, because mine is obsolete. That is how television manufacturers stay in business. Businesses prosper because of their ability to make people constantly dissatisfied with their possessions, regardless of how functional that their possessions are, and convince people to invest in a new product.

Everything in life is like that. It is likely that the only thing of which you will not be tempted to by a new and improved model is the casket in which they bury you. And there will be new and improved caskets, however the advertising industry has not yet developed an effective enough sales pitch to convince people to dig up their relatives and rebury them. My point is that the acquisition of possessions produces dissatisfaction, rather than satisfaction. But, in **Luke 12:15**:

**15 And [Jesus] said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."**

Covetousness is another word for being acquisition oriented.

There is a children's story concerning a man that had a goose that laid golden eggs on a periodic basis. The man was able to sell each egg laid and support himself. Unfortunately the man did not understand the cyclical nature of the goose's egg production, but rather thought that the goose had all of the golden eggs inside of her and was just laying them one at a time for some arbitrary reason. So, he decided to kill and gut the goose to acquire all of the golden eggs at once. But the man soon found, to his sorrow, that life is on a cycle, that the goose was not full of golden eggs, but produced the golden eggs one at a time on a periodic basis, and that he had killed his source of any future golden eggs.

The younger son in our story naively decided, like the man that killed the goose that laid the golden eggs, that if he could get all of the eggs at one time, he could survive indefinitely. He left his father's house with sufficient resources to buy a field in the far country and plant a crop that would produce, but he lacked the maturity to do so. In his father's house, he had been the immature son, and he relied on his mature father to take care of the cycle of life. When he wanted resources, even the resources required to go off on his own, he had always asked his father for them. But when the young man left his father and then used up the resources that he had, he found that he had nothing to plant in order to reap a harvest, and the realities of life caught up with him. **Luke 15:14** records:

**14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be**

**in want.**

Want is the result of covetousness, an immature focus on the acquisition of possessions. There is a malevolent force in the world driving us to become more and more covetous until we overload our ability to produce with the desire for things. The current banking crisis in our country exists because people took out loans to buy houses that they could not afford by agreeing to pay the interest on the loan but deferring paying the principle for several years. The loans were a gamble by the bank that incomes would increase enough in during the deferral period to allow the borrowers to make the higher principal payments when they came due, but wages did not rise sufficiently for that to happen. People in over their heads, not able to afford to pay back their loans, have simply chosen to accept foreclosure, giving the banks the ownership of the properties for which they cannot pay. But the banks can't resell the properties at prices sufficient to cover their costs. Banks do plan for some borrowers defaulting on their loans, but borrowers have defaulted in such massive numbers that the banks are not able to absorb the bad debts, and began having to go bankrupt themselves.

The root cause of the problem is the fact that the banking industry suspended the time tested rules of good credit, and gave people loans to buy houses that they could not afford. Does this seem more like a mature decision or an immature one? The borrower said, "I want a bigger house that I can't afford on my salary. Give it to me now, and I'll pay you back if my salary goes up."

The bankers are in trouble because they suspended time tested rules. The younger son in the parable did likewise, moving into the far country with youth and immaturity, but without wisdom and counsel. His plan to prosper in the far country was a failure, as were the principle deferred loans that the banks gave out, and the son ended up in foreclosure. But foreclosure does not remove you from the cyclical world, and the son still had his daily needs for food and shelter. He was used to being the owner's son, working in supervision over the servants, but he was no longer in his father's house, so he had to find something to do in order to live. **Luke 15:15-16** records:

**15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.**

**16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.**

Being an employee is different when your parents are not the owners of the company. The young man that wanted the video game would have had a much different problem had he been in an orphanage rather than in his mother's house. Your mother and father love you, but the unrelated people in the world, especially those that live in the far country, don't really care that much about you. The citizen to whom the son attached himself didn't care about the son; he just wanted to have his pigs fed. The son was feeding the pigs the long, bean-shaped pods of the carob tree, commonly used for fattening swine in Syria and Egypt. They contain a proportion of sugar. The very poorest of the population occasionally use them as food. The son of the rich man became the poorest of the poor.

There is nothing like poverty to give a formerly rich person a sense of perspective. **Luke 15:17** records:

**17 "But when [the son] came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants**



**have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!**

Hunger forced the younger son to look at the facts. Understanding and living by facts and principles is the key to maturity. We parents can prepare our children by training them in Christian principles, but simply because your children know Christian principles does not mean that your children are going to live by the principles that they know. Eve knew the principle in the Garden that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was poison. She explained this to the serpent, but the serpent replied, in **Genesis 3:4-5:**

**4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.**

**5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

The woman received her training in principles from God Himself. When she was confronted by the serpent, she did not forget that which God told her. The serpent offered the woman no proof that his alternate opinion was more trustworthy than that of God. She had absolutely no reason to believe the serpent, and every possible reason to believe God. Then why did the woman choose to disobey God? Covetousness. Acquisition orientation. God denied her the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so she wanted it. God gave her the fruit of all of the other trees, but the woman wanted to upgrade to the one that she didn't have.

Mankind is analogous to the younger brother, and the earth is analogous to the far country. When we leave heaven, God gives us the provision that we need; He gives us parents, churches, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We have all that we need to develop a father/son relationship with God, but still, there is that voice over in the far country that says, "disobey". **Proverbs 9:13-18** says:

**13 A foolish woman is clamorous; She is simple, and knows nothing.**

**14 For she sits at the door of her house, On a seat by the highest places of the city,**

**15 To call to those who pass by, Who go straight on their way:**

**16 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here"; And as for him who lacks understanding, she says to him,**

**17 "Stolen water is sweet, And bread eaten in secret is pleasant."**

**18 But he does not know that the dead are there, That her guests are in the depths of hell.**

Against the pull of the far country, is the pull of God. Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 11:28-30:**

**28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**

**29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**

**30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."**

Back home, in the father's house, is the promise of rest and a light burden, in the far country is hard work and hunger. At home, the son is the master of all he surveys; in the far country, he has to feed pigs and eat their food. The choice between the two lifestyles is not difficult but the question that the son has may be: after wasting the father's substance, how can the son be confident that his father will receive him again?

Well, the son can't be certain, but listen to the perspective of a man who has come to himself.

The son says to himself, ‘A stranger in the far country, whom I did not know, took me in as a servant. Ought I not reasonably expect my father to take me in as graciously as a stranger did?’

That’s good thinking.

The son continues, ‘I’m starving here in the far country. Even if my father is angry and refuses to take me back, I have nothing here, so I have nothing to lose by going back home. My chances of getting a good job from my father is much better than my chance of getting a better job than this from the stranger in the far country.’

This reality should be intuitively obvious to anyone that looks at it. It was to Moses, as **Hebrews 11:24-26** says:

**24** By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,  
**25** choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,  
**26** esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The intelligent decision would be to give up the far country and go home. So the son decides, in **Luke 15:18-21**:

**18** I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,  
**19** and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”  
**20** “And he arose and came to his father.

This parable is telling us that we have trouble in this life because we have left our heavenly father with the plan to make it on our own. We can’t do it. Yes, we can spend the capital that God has given us and make it for awhile, but we will eventually come to the end of our abilities. At that point, we will need God. Even if you have sufficient financial resources to last you for the rest of your life, you are going to run into an event that is going to make you need to go back to God’s home. The cyclical nature of life indicates that life does not last forever. Everything that has a beginning has an end. Eventually this life is going to end. At that point, when you are on your bed of affliction and preparing to die, what will your plan be? The best plan of which I can think would be to go to the Father, admit your mistakes and ask for His forgiveness. Jesus Christ came into the world just so that we could do that. **John 3:16-17** tells us:

**16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.  
**17** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

We call God our Heavenly Father because He does not condemn us. His plan, like that of the earthly father in the parable is to receive us at home. Jesus tells us, in **John 14:1-3**:

**1** “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.  
**2** In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.  
**3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that

**where I am, there you may be also.**

**4 And where I go you know, and the way you know.”**

**5 Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”**

**6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**

The way home is plainly marked on corners around the country and the world, at every location in which there is a church. The way home is through Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross of Calvary so that the foolish, sinful things that we do in our lives can be forgiven by God. Jesus Christ died, and now God is standing at the door of heaven waiting, looking for us to come home. **Luke 15:20-24** reads:

**20 “But when he was still 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 to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’**

**22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.**

**23 And bring the fatted calf here 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.**

That which you may have done in the far country when you left God can be forgiven. All you have to do is come home.

Foolishness and immaturity can be forgiven. All you have to do is come home.

The father is waiting with open arms for you. All you have to do is come home.

There is a robe for you, a ring for your finger and shoes for your feet. All you have to do is come home.

The Lord Jesus Christ has paid back the inheritance that you squandered in the far country. All you have to do is come home.

Be humble enough to recognize that life is better at home than it is in the far country. All you have to do is come home.

God knows, God cares, God will set up residence in your life and make things better. All you have to do is come home.

Jesus is telling us in this parable that the only requirement for getting into Heaven is realizing that you are in the far country and coming home. You don’t have to bring anything but the acknowledgement that you have sinned against heaven and in the sight of God, and are not worthy to be called a son.

Do you want to be relieved of the cares of the far country? The Bible give us instructions, in **Romans 10:8-13:**

**8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach):**

**9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**

**10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is**



made unto salvation.

**11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”**

**12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.**

**13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”**

**John 3:16-17** tells us:

**16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

All you have to do is come home. Let us give up the far country, develop maturity and responsibility and come home to the Father.

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