

Let's pray.

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at Luke 15:31. This will be our last sermon on the parable of the prodigal son. The parable has greatly encouraged me, and I hope it has you as well.

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Lessons from the Prodigal Son's Brother and Jonah.*"

First, we are going to look at some verses in Jonah and I will begin with a lesson to set us up...

Lesson One: Jonah contains the parable of the prodigal son.¹

I have been thinking about the ways Jonah resembles the older brother, but I wanted to wait until we got toward the end of the parable so you would have the familiarity to see the similarities.

Reading **Jonah 4** is like reading **Luke 15:25-31**. Jonah is like the Old Testament older brother. I hope this will become clear as we read the verses, and allow us to examine our hearts and see if we're at all like Jonah or older brother.

Go ahead and start at **Jonah 3:10** for context...

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Now if you didn't already know this account, what would you expect the next verse to say about Jonah?

Then Jonah rejoiced greatly over the Ninevites' forgiveness. He was very thankful and blessed that God was so gracious and merciful. He called together his friends and neighbors and said, "Rejoice with me, for the Ninevites who were lost have been found. They were dead and are now alive." And he began to celebrate.

Instead, he looks just like the older brother...

Jonah 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

Here's the typology:

- The Ninevites look like the younger brother. They live wickedly, but they repent and are immediately forgiven.
- Jonah looks like the older brother. He's upset about the Ninevites' forgiveness like the older brother was upset about his younger brother's forgiveness.
- And God looks like the father. He forgave the Ninevites as quickly and graciously as the father forgave the youngest son.

And why does God in **Jonah 4** look like the Father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son? Because it's the same Father!

If you write in your Bible, you can circle this verse, draw a line, and write **Luke 15:28**, which says...

Luke 15:28 [the older brother] was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,

The words **anger** or **angry** occur six times in **Jonah 4**. It shows just how angry he was, which is a stark contrast to the joy he should have felt.

The word anger occurs again in verse two while Jonah criticizes God for being slow to anger...

Jonah 4:2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that YOU ARE A GRACIOUS GOD and merciful, SLOW TO ANGER and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

If you remember our last sermon it was titled, “When God’s Grace to Others Bothers Us.”

Jonah would have worked as another example in that sermon. Notice he said, “You are a gracious God,” but he wasn’t happy about it. He wasn’t praising God’s character. He was angry at God’s grace, because it was being shown to others.

The word **angry** occurs again in verse four...

Jonah 4:4 And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be ANGRY?” 5 Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

Jonah’s actions here also make him look like the older brother. **Luke 15:28** said the older brother **refused to go in** to the party to celebrate his brother’s forgiveness, and Jonah refused to go into the city to celebrate the Ninevites’ forgiveness.

Jonah 4:6 Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

Now there’s a transition from Jonah looking like the older brother to God looking like the father. **Luke 15:28** says **[the father] came out and entreated [the older brother]:**

- Just like the father could have rebuked the older brother for his ugly attitude, God could have rebuked Jonah for his ugly attitude.
- Instead, just like the father came outside the celebration to minister to his oldest son, God came outside the city to minister to Jonah.

And the way the Father graciously deals with the older son parallels the way God graciously deals with Jonah in the following verses...

Jonah 4:7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

For the second time Jonah says that he would like to die. Then the word **angry** occurs three times in verse nine...

Jonah 4:9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” 10 And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

And we see another parallel as we come to the end of this account...

Notice the word **pity** occurs twice. In **verse 10** God points out that Jonah had pity on the plant, and in **verse 11** says that He should pity the city of Nineveh even more because of the 120,000 people who would have been judged.

The Hebrew word for pity is *hûs* (pronounced hoos) and it means, “*have compassion or look upon with compassion.*” This is why many Bibles, such as the NASB and Amplified translate this as compassion instead of pity.

If you write in your Bible in **verse 11** you can circle the words **I pity Nineveh** and write **Luke 15:20** which says...

Luke 15:20 While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and FELT COMPASSION, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

God looks like the father here, because the compassion He felt toward the repentant Ninevites parallels the compassion the father felt toward his repentant son.

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I wanted to look at these verses in Jonah because they reinforce the teaching on the older brother. If God is going to put two similar accounts in the Bible – one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament – it seems to me He’s trying to drive home the points they make.

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And with that, go ahead and turn to **Luke 15**, so we can finish this wonderful parable. Afte

Let me remind you that even though we focus on the younger brother when we read this parable, Jesus taught it in response to the religious leaders’ criticism that He receives sinners and eats with them. Because of that, it wouldn’t be too much to say the parable is as much, or maybe even more so, about the older brother, who represents them.

Luke 15:31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

We see continued graciousness from the father despite his son’s continued rudeness:

- The father was kind in verse 27
- The son was rude in verses 28-30.

We might expect the father to give his older son the rebuke he deserved, but he continued to be gracious toward him.

Even though the son wouldn’t address his father with any respectful title, such as father or Lord – instead he simply said, “Look.” – the father tenderly addresses him as, “**Son.**”

And it is kinder than it looks because the Greek word for son is *yhios* (pronounced: wee-oss). It is the word used throughout the parable for son. Eight times to be exact...

Luke 15:11 And he said, “There was a man who had two sons (*yhios*)...13 Not many days later, the younger son (*yhios*) gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country...

But this is *teknon* (pronounced tek-nahn), which is the Greek word for child. In other words, the father addressed his son very gently as a child.

Robert Morrison said, “*The father did not call him son. He called him child – so it is in the Greek – and child is a word of tenderest affection.*”

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Then, in response to his son’s accusation that he never received so much as **a young goat**, the wise father seeks to reconcile with his son by sharing a few things with him...

First, he tells his son that they are always together, reminding him of their friendship and fellowship that has never been threatened.

Michael Morrison said, “*Every day he had his father’s company, and the blessed society of home. His father’s love was round about him constantly.*”

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Second, he reminds him that everything he has also belongs to him. Briefly look back at **verse 12**...

Luke 15:12 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.

Everything the father had was in the older brother’s possession because the inheritance had already been distributed. All the father had remaining technically belonged to the older brother and was available to him for the asking.

The older brother didn’t think his father would let him have a party with his friends, but, as it turns out, the father never restricted him in that way.

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We can tell the father deeply loves his older son as well. He has not forgotten him or neglected him...and this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: When God blesses others it doesn’t mean less for us.

Please give me some latitude to discuss something that will relate to this in a moment...

One of the problems with socialists, or socialism, is that wealth is viewed as a limited resource. So, if one person has more than others must have less. This is why in socialist circles rich people are viewed negatively because they have supposedly taken wealth from those with less. It is almost like the Nazis convincing the Germans that the Jews were bad because they had everyone’s wealth.

Capitalists generally recognize that wealth can increase across the board, and even as it increases for the wealthiest it often trickles down to benefit those with less.

Now why would I mention this?

Because I think it illustrates what happened with the oldest son and could happen with us. The older son might not have had a socialist mindset with finances, but it seems like he did with blessings. He saw his father’s blessings as a limited resource and the younger brother’s blessings meant less blessing for him.

But the father explained that just because the younger brother was blessed it doesn’t mean there was less blessing for him. He said, *“All that is mine is yours. You are not missing out on anything just because I blessed your brother. More for him doesn’t mean less for you.”*

Maybe we think the same sometimes when we see people who are blessed?

We view God’s blessings as a limited resource, so if other people are blessed, then that means less for us.

But the father’s words reveal this isn’t the case.

And this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: Do we recognize our spiritual blessings?

The older brother didn’t recognize all he had available to him. Some commentators, such as John MacArthur, see the religious leaders in this:

- They had access to all the riches of God’s truth.
- They had the inheritance as well.
- They spent their lives dealing with Scripture and public worship.

But they never possessed any of the treasures enjoyed by the repentant sinner.

They were steeped in a works-based religion:

- They hoped to earn God's blessings versus receiving them by grace through faith.
- They failed to comprehend the meaning of forgiveness, which is why they were angry when Jesus forgave repentant sinners.

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It is shocking that the older brother and the religious leaders had so many blessings available to them but didn't seem to notice.

Spiritually speaking, we are sons of the Father, heirs and joint heirs with Christ, and I wonder how many blessings we have at our disposal that we might not notice?

Please mark your spot in Luke and please briefly turn to **Ephesians 1**.

Let's look at how God says He blesses his children EVERY day...

He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

He chose us in Him...

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love He predestined us for adoption...

In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses...

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

He has made known to us the mystery of His will...

9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

In him we have obtained an inheritance...

11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

We were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it...

13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Brothers and sisters, that's a lot of blessings!

And notice none of them are physical. The older son complained about his younger brother getting a goat, a party, and the fattened calf. All physical and temporary. None of them spiritual or eternal.

And if you're like me, you can be like the older brother looking around at the physical, forgetting all the spiritual blessings we've been given.

God could say to us what the father said to the older brother...

“Son [or daughter], you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. [All the blessings in Ephesians and other places belong to you.]”

Earthly fathers like to bless their children and considering how much more our Heavenly Father loves us, I know He wants to bless us as well.

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Look at the last verse of the parable...

Luke 15:32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

In **verse 30** the older brother called the younger brother **this son of yours**. He couldn't bring himself to call him, “my brother.” But the father gently rebuked him by reminding him that the younger son is **your brother**.

Even though the older brother looked down on the younger brother, if you had to choose between being either of these sons, who would you rather be?

I would rather be the younger son.

Why?

Because people who sin greatly – even committing murder or adultery – but repent, will always have a better standing with God than people with lesser sins, but who fail to walk in humility and repentance.ⁱⁱ

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This last verse reveals one of the other similarities between the accounts: God encouraged Jonah to celebrate the Ninevites' repentance, and the father encouraged the older son to celebrate his younger brother's repentance. And this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson Four: The Prodigal Son's Brother and Jonah teach us (Part One) to rejoice over salvation.

Verse 32 is the last verse not just of the parable, but of the chapter that can be viewed as one unit. And the words **It was fitting to celebrate and be glad** capture one of the themes of the chapter as shown by each parable: the shepherd, the woman, and the father all rejoice when the lost is found, which is what we should do too.

But what you notice with Jonah and the older brother is the absence of joy. They're both angry instead.

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Now, am I the only one who wonders how the older brother responded?

And this is one of the other similarities between the accounts: they end on cliffhangers:

- How did Jonah respond to God's ministry to him? Did he end up going into the city of Nineveh to celebrate?
- How did the older brother respond to the father's ministry to him? Did he end up going into his home to celebrate?

We aren't told.

Both accounts are left open-ended and written in such a way:

- It looks like God was holding out hope for Jonah to rejoice
- And it looks like the father was holding out hope for the older brother to rejoice

This parable is left open-ended because Jesus preached it to rebuke the religious leaders, and it is up to them how they respond.

Will they stop despising repentant sinners and instead rejoice over their salvation or remain resentful and self-righteous? Sadly, we know the answer.

The application for us is, will we rejoice over sinners' salvation?

I have been enjoying the ACBC training that started Friday and continued through yesterday evening. One of the messages was about the church being a body and feeling what members of the body are feeling:

- **Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**
- **1 Corinthians 12:26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

These verses make the same point that we should strive to feel what other members are feeling.ⁱⁱⁱ

Today we have some baptisms. Do we see them as times of celebration?

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Next...

Lesson Four: The Prodigal Son's Brother and Jonah teach us (Part Two) God wants to forgive.

This chapter and the Book of Jonah reveal why Jesus hasn't returned yet: He wants more people to be saved. He wants more lost people to be found and more dead people to be made alive.

And Scripture supports this...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Charles Spurgeon said about these parables, *"The truth here taught is just this: that mercy stretches forth her hand to misery, that grace receives men as sinners, that it deals with demerit, unworthiness and worthlessness; that those who think themselves righteous are not the objects of divine compassion, but the unrighteous, the guilty and the undeserving, are the proper subjects for the infinite mercy of God; in a word, that salvation is not of merit but of grace."*

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So, this chapter speaks to all unrepentant sinners, or we could say all tax collectors and sinners, represented by the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the younger brother. The message is God loves you.:

- He wants to find you.
- He wants you to repent and come home.

You will be welcomed lovingly and graciously.

And this reveals a real burden with this chapter that's particularly clear with the parable of the prodigal son. We generally think of this chapter as being very encouraging, which it is, but it also carries with it high accountability.

We are given this incredible window into God's heart, and we see that nobody is too wicked for Him. Nobody will have an excuse when dealing with such a loving and merciful God.

Nobody is going to be able to say:

- *"God could never forgive me."*
- *"I have done too much for God to ever be merciful to me."*
- *"God could never love me after what I've done."*

Anyone who reads this can tell that...

Romans 5:20 where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

However terrible our sin might seem, God's forgiveness and love is infinitely greater.

When God can forgive the younger son, we know He can forgive us too.

And what did the younger son do to be forgiven?

He repented. If we do that we see that no prodigal is ever beyond being forgiven too.

Let's pray.

ⁱ A few times I have played a little game with you or I ask you to give me the name of the person I am describing. I would like to do that again, but this time I would like to make it even easier. Instead of asking you for the name of the person I am going to describe an account and I just want you to tell me the testament that account is in. You just have to tell me if I am describing an account in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Are we ready?

There is an instance of beautiful humility and repentance. Forgiveness and mercy is extended. But a man looks on and is angry at what he sees. The Bible tells us he is angry. We don't have to guess that. He remains outside looking on. But someone goes out to graciously deal with him and talk to him about his anger, why he is angry, why he shouldn't be angry, but it is left open ended. It is a cliffhanger. We don't find out how the person responded.

Am I talking about an account in the Old Testament or the New Testament?

ⁱⁱ DONE:

- EW
- FT
- HCC
- Life application
- Gospel transformation Bible
- JM
- Nelson
- Moody
- Expository commentary
- ESV study Bible

ⁱⁱⁱ And we see this call to celebrate corporately in each of the parables through the verses about getting the friends and neighbors to rejoice too.