

## **“Grace Is Bigger Than All That” – Pr Jim Sprengle**

### **Lent 4 – March 30, 2025**

- I. **Luke 15** – The Parable of the Prodigal Son, previously read
- II. **Today’s parable is full of shocking and outrageous behavior.**
  - a. Parables tend to have some unusual or surprising parts in them to grab the attention of those hearing the story... and for a first century Jew, many parts of this parable would be appalling.
  - b. As the parable begins, the younger of two sons asks his father for his portion of the inheritance.
    - i. Even today, the thought of seeking an inheritance before someone dies is at least rude... and at most evil.
      - 1. It says to the father that the son wishes he were dead.
    - ii. When the father gave the son his inheritance early, the son made it clear what he thought of his father and family – he left... he abandoned them... as if they were no better than dead to him.
    - iii. For the son, wealth meant freedom from a life in the framework of family and its normal obligations.
  - c. So, we have two troubling parts... first, I want my inheritance early... and second, goodbye – I’m out of here!
    - i. Then he abandoned his father and family so that he could go live his life without abandon... meaning he squandered his money... or literally, he threw his money around like a farmer spreads seeds... and lived in debauchery, gluttony, immorality... he was out of control and his life was unmanageable.
  - d. Because of his lack of foresight, he spent all he had... which became a real problem because the area he was in experienced a famine, and he had nothing to fall back on... no money, no family, and it seems no friends to support or help in any way.
    - i. Any safety net he had was burned up by his own actions, and now he was so far down the scale that he took the only job available.
    - ii. Maybe you’ve seen the show, “Dirty Jobs” with Mike Rowe... as he does the dirtiest jobs imaginable – sewage pipe cleaner, charcoal maker, or roadkill cleaner to name a few.
      - 1. I’m pretty sure he did a segment on pig farmer too, because nothing smells worse than a pig farm.
    - iii. For the Prodigal Son, working among the pigs was not only dirty in the physical nature of the work, but it was dirty because of the spiritual nature of swine being an unclean animal that God told the Jews to avoid.
    - iv. To make matters worse (as if they could be worse than that), he’s longing to eat the pig food.

- e. So, the son has cut himself off from his father and family, and essentially rejected his Jewish faith by working for a Gentile (non-Jew) and feeding this man's pigs...
  - i. He disconnected from his family and religion to connect to brokenness and sin outside of God's will for him.
- f. In this great need... at the very bottom of the scale, and everything in life had failed him because of his selfish behavior... he came to himself.
  - i. Maybe you've heard the saying that you hit bottom when you stop digging?
  - ii. The son saw the wreckage of his present, looked around, and stopped digging himself into a bigger mess... he came to himself.

III. **Have you experienced a time in life when you "came to yourself"?**

- a. Some of us have gone so far down the scale that it seemed hopeless.
  - i. Many of the people we see living on the streets and using drugs and alcohol are digging to their rock bottoms.
  - ii. Some people get into financial troubles or gambling, and they end up with massive debts or bankruptcies.
  - iii. Others get involved in pornography and sexual addictions that destroy their marriages, force them out of careers, and even land them in prison.
  - iv. Still others try to make money as the most important thing... as they become more successful or famous, all the cars, mansions, expensive clothing and accessories become part of an emptiness that gives them no joy at all.
    - 1. I just saw a faith testimonial about a woman who made millions of dollars in the adult entertainment industry... and it all came crashing down when she "came to herself" and realized that she lacked any feelings or conscience about her behavior.
    - 2. As she sought forgiveness and came to faith, everything changed in her perspective about life and what was important.
- b. Yet, I don't want to give the impression that hitting bottom means we are lying in a gutter somewhere... because we Christians can walk away from God daily like the Prodigal Son walked away from his father.
  - i. Any given day, we can say to God that we don't need Him in our lives by our actions of going our own way... ignoring Him... or misusing His gifts.
  - ii. For example, when we worry excessively or allow fear to rule in our hearts because of people or situations in our lives... we are not trusting in God as the First Commandment tells us to.
  - iii. When we claim to be a Christian but our behavior does not reflect God in our lives at all... when we live contrary to God's Word we are profaning and misusing the name of God.

- iv. If we allow lust to overtake our thoughts on a regular basis it doesn't mean it's ok just because we didn't do anything about it, as Jesus says that "everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28)
- v. If we are employed and we spend much of our time online, on social media, or doing personal things, we are stealing from our employer and breaking the Seventh Commandment.
- vi. All of us can go through the list and see where we are no better than the Prodigal Son when it comes to sinning and walking away from God... so the question is, when do we "come to ourselves" and return home?
- c. Nothing we do can make our sins right again... not even repenting and turning to God... because the sins that have us abandoning our Father in heaven and going our own way are only forgiven by what Jesus did.

IV. **When we come home to Jesus**, God's grace is bigger than our brokenness.

- a. Many years ago before I went to the seminary, I began attending a Lutheran Church... and we had a vacancy pastor.
  - i. I reached out to him because I spent so many years like the Prodigal Son, and when I finally returned to Jesus... I just couldn't believe the promise that I was forgiven... there had to be more to it.
  - ii. With his kind eyes looking at me, he leaned forward on his desk and said, "God's grace is bigger than all that."
  - iii. For some reason, with those words, it was like the scales fell off my eyes and I could see clearly that God welcomes sinners just like me... He wants nothing more than to restore us to life in Jesus.
- b. The Prodigal Son thought he would just put his head down in shame and work a lowly job for his dad... but in his mind, he was probably thinking I need to pay for this whole debacle... I need to get right by showing my dad that I blew it and maybe after a long time he will trust me again.
  - i. Yet, the son also must have known deep down that his father was the only place left to go... it was the father's love for him that called him home.
- c. And the father, from a long way off saw his broken, destitute son... who deserved nothing but shame and punishment for his selfishness, and he ran out to him with abandon...
  - i. Nothing gave the father more joy than to embrace a son that was dead in his sins and trespasses and to restore him fully in forgiveness, mercy... and grace.
  - ii. What an incredible picture of the Father's love for us... but also, this is a picture of our Savior Jesus Christ as He welcomes the broken, the lowly, the tax collector, and the sinner.

- d. Of course, the brother is offended at the grace given to his rotten little brother, but he is no better, because he thought his work and life of obedience was worthy of grace.
  - i. So we see, the only work that is important is the death and resurrection of Jesus, as He died for us and for our sins of walking away from God.
  - ii. Here is where our faith and the Holy Spirit helps us to “come to ourselves” as we go back home to Jesus... as He sprints out to meet us with a huge hug... and He whispers in our ear, “Welcome home... My grace is bigger than all that.” Amen.