



Grace Lutheran Church
Valentine, NE

MAIL MINISTRY

Trinity 3

June 17, 2018

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 25

Hymns: 242; 280; 755; 45

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 12:1-6
Acts 3:1-16

Topics: Christian Life; Law/Gospel; Repentance; Sanctification

In the Name of Jesus!

Text: Luke 15:11-32

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 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. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. 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. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 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. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"

In Christ Jesus, whose gospel message reveals the wondrous nature of our heavenly Father's love, dear fellow redeemed:

One of the first and most important lessons we can learn as Christians is that the Bible has two major teachings—the law and the gospel. The law shows us our sin, while the gospel shows us our Savior. The purpose of the law is threefold: to curb our sinful desires, to condemn our sinful actions, and to instruct us in the will of God. It was and never has been intended, however, to save us. That important function is reserved for the gospel, which is the good news that God loves this world of lost sinners including each of us and has provided for our salvation through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. These lessons are so very vital for all of us to learn and to retain, because they reveal the difference between biblical Christianity and all other religions. All other religions are based on the law, but none of them has the gospel, for none of them acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and mankind's only Savior.

Knowing these truths and applying them properly, however, is not always easy. Failing to do

so can lead to all sorts of problems in our Christian lives. In fact, failing to remember and apply these basic truths concerning law and gospel can leave us lost and in danger of losing the salvation God has so graciously provided. Let us examine that problem today as we consider Jesus' parable of *The Lost Sons*. We will see that **GOD HAS A PROFOUND LOVE FOR HIS CHILDREN, including...those lost in the world, and those lost in the church!**

The background of this parable is found in the first verses of Luke 15: *"Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him (Jesus) to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"* Two sets of people are mentioned: *"tax collectors and...sinners"* and *"Pharisees and scribes."* Both sets had problems understanding and applying law and gospel and both sets were at times lost to the Lord.

I.

Let us consider, first of all, **those lost in the world!** In the parable, they are represented by the younger son. As the parable begins the younger son asks his father for his inheritance. After receiving it, he traveled into a far country where he wasted everything he had been given on wild living. He soon lost everything and found himself alone and penniless. He got a job with a farmer feeding his pigs, but the farmer was so hard on the young man he did not even provide him with proper food or lodging. The young man found himself utterly destitute and eating the food he was feeding the pigs. At that point he repented. He recognized with sorrow what he had given up—the safety and security of his father's house. He knew he did not deserve his father's love, which he had so distained, but he hoped perhaps if he returned home his father would have mercy on him and allow him to be a servant. At least then he would enjoy some sense of safety and security.

Let us examine this young man's situation more closely. First of all, the young man was foolish. He did not value the love and security of his father's home and thought that he would find greater joy and satisfaction in material possessions. Secondly, the young man was restless. He resented the structure and rules established by his father in his home. He wanted to get away and be free to experience everything the world could offer him, thinking he would thereby find fulfillment. Thirdly, the young man was naïve, believing that the people of this world could be trusted more than his father. To his great sorrow the young man came to understand that life in the world was not all what he imagined. In fact, it could not compare to what he knew he had lost.

My dear friends, we too can become lost in the world. We too can be foolish, devaluing the gospel and thinking that material things will bring us greater joy than our relationship with Jesus. That is impossible, for all material things are temporal and corruptible. They break down, can be lost or stolen, or can simply be used up and be gone. To trade a love that leads to eternal blessing for the passing pleasure of material things is foolish! Such foolishness fails to appreciate the precious nature of the gospel. We too can be restless, viewing God and His will as too restrictive. We can begin to think of God as a celestial kill-joy who does not want us to have any fun, and we figure that we can do better on our own and with fewer restrictions out there in the world. Thereby we fail to understand important purposes of the law—to instruct us in the will of God, which is always intended to protect and bless us. We too can be naïve, thinking that people out there in the world are more trustworthy than God—once again devaluing the gospel. Oh, yes, we may well have many friends out in the world, as long as we have money to pay for their good times. However, so very often our worldly experience mirrors that of the younger son—worldly friends are so often fair-weather friends, who disappear during the hard times leaving us with nothing other than feelings of regret and having been used.

But note what happened when the younger son returned to his father's home. He found his father waiting, watching, and welcoming. The father in the parable did not send his servants after his younger son when he went out into the world. He knew that his son had much to learn and could only learn it from what we at times call the "school of hard-knocks." The father waited, but not with indifference. He was watching, and when he saw his younger son approaching, he went out to welcome him. He did not stand on the porch with arms folded and then disdainfully say, "Well, son, I told you so!" Rather, as the younger son began reciting his rehearsed speech, his father would have none of it. Instead he robed and ringed his son and ordered a great celebration, for as he observed—the dead was alive again, and the lost had been found!

My dear friends, our heavenly Father is just like that father. He will not force us to follow Him, but you can rest assured that He is waiting for us. Indeed, He will providentially use the events of our lives at times to chasten us and lead us as well to repentance. The Scriptures tell us, *“Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”* (Heb. 12:6) When we return, however, with a repentant heart, He welcomes us and rejoices in us. So often we fail properly to understand the use of the law, thinking that it is a means of salvation. We believe we have to keep the law at a certain level before we deserve and can earn God’s love, and that if we do not do that, then we are unworthy and will be rejected. But the law does not save. The law condemns and brings us to the place where we despair in ourselves. The gospel is all about a God who receives, forgives, embraces, and celebrates the repentant sinner’s return. Let us not hesitate to return with repentant hearts to our heavenly Father. He will receive us with joy and heaven’s angels themselves will rejoice! **GOD HAS A PROFOUND LOVE FOR HIS CHILDREN, including those lost in the world,** and...

II.

...**those lost in the church!** The older son in the parable represented the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus’ day and sadly many members of the Christian church today. The older son heard the sounds of celebration as he returned from his work in the fields. He inquired of the family servants and learned of his younger brother’s return and the party his father was hosting. The news did not bring him joy, but angered him, and he refused to join in the festivities. What were his problems? They are revealed in his conversation with his father. The older brother was bitter, resentful, and judgmental. He was tired of all of the work, the rules, and the requirements of being part of his father’s household. He had worked hard, thinking he had to earn his father’s love, and he resented the fact that his father was celebrating the younger brother’s return. He resented the fact that his father had never given him a goat with which to celebrate with his friends. His father apparently failed to appreciate all of his efforts. He judged his brother to be a no-good, worthless philanderer, who did not deserve all of the attention he was getting. This older brother was lost even though he had remained home.

My dear friends, we can be lost right here in the church! We too can forget the nature of true grace and assume that the basis for our relationship with God is mere obedience to His laws. We can fail to remember the beauty of the gospel and believe that Christianity is just about always having to do the right thing. We can get resentful of the blessings that others receive and question the fairness of God when we fail to get the recognition we feel we deserve. We can look askance at people who have fallen into manifest sins and fail to welcome them back into the church when they repent. Viewing the law as a means of earning God’s favor, while allowing the wonder of the gospel’s love to fade can leave a person lost in the church!

But note the father’s response. He was present, providential, and patient. He went out to see his son and spoke to him personally. He assured him that he would always be with him, reminding him of his constant love. He reasoned with him patiently, recognizing his frustration and assuaging his anger by reminding him that everything he had was his. He did not grow impatient with his older son, but quietly and carefully rehearsed why he too should rejoice in the return of his younger brother. Indeed, the restoration of the family was reason for rejoicing!

My dear friends, as faithful church-going Christians we need to be reminded of the presence of God in our lives. We need to be reminded of God’s grace and His providential blessings—blessings bestowed by the merits and mercy of Christ, not because of anything we have done on our own. We need to be reminded that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for the world (cf. Jn. 3:16). It is indeed a shame that anyone is lost, but let us not be lost right here in the church being resentful of those who come home to God. Rather, may we rejoice as is fitting when the lost have indeed been found. Remember always...**GOD HAS A PROFOUND LOVE FOR HIS CHILDREN!** Amen.

--Pastor Paul D. Nolting
To God alone be glory!