

the Gathering

near God. near man.



At The Gathering, you'll hear 4 words a lot: Near God. Near man.

But what do they mean? Over the next few weeks we'll try to examine Scriptures that shine some light on what happens when we're near God.

Today, we'll examine the parable of the prodigal son.

I. The Context

- a. This is the third time in Luke that Jesus has eaten with the religious and those the religious called outcasts
 - i. 5:29-32 and 7:36-50
 - ii. It has been intentional
 - iii. It has earned Jesus a reputation (15:2)
- b. Our parable is the third in a series of three
 - i. They all speak of finding what was lost
 - ii. They all end with over the top celebrations
 1. This exposes the contrast between who should be extended hospitality
 2. It exposes the contrast between the world's values and heaven's values
 - a. We value condition (religious leaders)
 - i. If you're good enough, you're accepted.
 - ii. Leads to dishonesty and bondage
 - b. Heaven values position (Jesus)
 - i. You're accepted before you're good enough.
 - ii. Leads to honesty and freedom
 - iii. They show Jesus' great story-telling ability
 - iv. They grow in intensity and drama
 1. First, 1 in 100 is lost (vv. 3-7)
 2. Then 1 in 10 (vv. 8-10)
 3. Finally, 1 in 2 (vv. 11-32)

II. The Parable

- a. Younger son asked for – and received – his inheritance (v. 12)
 - i. Would have been 1/3 – the firstborn was entitled to 2x as much
 - ii. (Deut. 21:17)
 - iii. Interesting to note that the older son got his, too
- b. He left home (v. 13)
 - i. with all he had – no intention of returning
 - ii. went to a distant country (suggestion is the non-Jewish world)
 - iii. he squandered the inheritance
 1. word literally means the opposite of “got together”
 - a. instead of packing, it would be throwing clothes all over the room

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2. with wild living
 - a. literally, one who cannot be saved, or save
 - b. he threw his money away
- c. The downward spiral (vv. 14-16)
 - i. Had nothing
 - ii. Then a famine
 - iii. Ended up feeding pigs
 - iv. The lowest he could get according to Jewish culture
 - v. Craving pig slop, he realizes how far he's fallen
- d. Finally, he makes a choice (v. 17-20a)
 - i. To be near his father as a servant is better than being far from him as a son
 - ii. It is fair to say that he began to appreciate the love his father had, not just for him, but even for his hired men
 - iii. When we start to understand God's love, being around that love consumes us more than ambition or status
 - iv. Psalm 84:10
 - v. How many times did he rehearse his speech on the return trip?
- e. The father overwhelms the son (v. 20b-24)
 - i. He saw him in the distance
 - ii. He was filled with compassion (literally "moved in the bowels")
 1. Bowels were considered the seat of love and pity
 2. Weird.
 - iii. He made a very public show of how he valued position over condition
 1. He ran – the way cities were laid out, this would have attracted a lot of attention
 2. He embraced him
 3. He kissed him – literally, kept on kissing him
 - iv. The son never got to finish his planned speech (v. 21)
 - v. He gave him:
 1. The BEST robe
 2. Ring and sandals – servants never wore these
 3. The BIGGEST calf
 - a. Enough for 35-70 people
 - b. They partied
- f. The older son doesn't get it
 - i. He'd done the work
 - ii. He appeared to have the right condition
 - iii. The outlandish love of his father for the prodigal cracked the mask and revealed the true condition of his heart:
 1. "I've been SLAVING for you"
 2. "I've NEVER disobeyed"
 3. "This son of YOURS"
 4. "with PROSTITUTES"

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5. Words mean things. He wasn't a slave, surely wasn't perfect, was the brother of the prodigal and embellished the story to make the prodigal look even worse

III. Observations

- a. 2 sons, only 1 came to his senses
- b. 2 sons are with their father, but only 1 is near the father
- c. One son "went to his father" (v. 20), but the other "refused to go in" (v. 28)
- d. It would seem that the older brother stumbles over the outlandish restoration of his brother by the father.
- e. In short, he stumbles over the love of the father.
- f. So do we. We don't know how to love without condition, or, in this case, in spite of condition.
- g. We seek the power of God for so many things, but we need it to understand the way He loves us, and others (Eph. 3:14-21)

IV. Conclusion

- a. When we are near a God who loves like we just saw, the only response we can have is to be passionate about redeeming everyone around us to that same love
- b. Will you be?