

Tuesday, May 21 | The lesson.

Luke 15:13-19 “Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.””

Are you shaking your head yet? Man, do we chalk it up to: he didn’t know how to handle his fortune, lack of life experience, or he didn’t care? It’s not a true story, so why did Jesus tell these leaders all of these details? I’ll keep my ideas to myself for now, but you think about it.

The younger son squandered everything. Then he went to work feeding pigs. Picture their faces when Jesus says a young Jewish man is feeding the very animals they consider unclean! He even “longed” to eat the pigs’ food. Absolute nonsense.

In verse 17 it says, “But when he came to himself...”, meaning he realized he acted foolishly. In verse 18 he says he’ll go to his father and say, “I have sinned...” Don’t misunderstand this for repentance. He only wants to keep from starving and being disowned by his family. He alludes to this in verse 19 by saying he’ll ask to be treated as one of his father’s hired servants. It’s a plea of desperation, not a cry of repentance.

The son is trying to work his way back into keeping the law. We cannot save ourselves by working for it. We are saved by grace. If he can work himself into the family, grace won’t be necessary. Are we able to return to God on our own devices? Don’t we need his help? We cannot save ourselves nor can we wipe away our sin. It takes the Father finding us.

Back to one part of the big picture. Why did Jesus give all these details? This situation was hard. Shameful. Damaging and costly to this father and family. The father still gave the son what he asked for. No harsh words. He made the arrangements. Sometimes lessons have to be learned that way. Definitely not easy! It’s not fun for the Father either.

In God’s infinite wisdom, he knows when this kind of lesson has to be given. Our best interest is to learn from his teachings and prevent this life lesson. I know I’ve gotten what I asked for before and certainly didn’t need it!

Whether you’re looking from the angle of the lesson learned or the lesson taught, there’s much to digest. The listeners were no doubt mulling over a lot of information. It can be a real struggle to let go of a comfortable routine for a new path God is revealing. Although the initial intention of the son wasn’t an attitude of repentance, he still left the path he was on and headed home to the father. I’m not sure this would have lined up with biblical tradition either. An angry family community would be waiting on him.

God's plans won't always make those around us comfortable. This son made poor decisions and would have to face harsh consequences. Better to turn away from his sinful, shameful, wasteful life, and face the consequences sooner than later. He must be willing to face that in exchange for doing what was right.

Doing what is right looks like many, many different things depending on the situation. Sometimes it's giving up something, and other times it's taking on more. Whatever God's directive is, no other voice matters.

RESPONSE: Allow God to search your heart today.

RESPONSE: Share a way God has moved in your life recently.

MEMORY VERSE 1: Galatians 5:1, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."