

## Daily Readings

Please note: As we look at the existence of heaven, the suggested readings this week come from some of the best passages in the New Testament on resurrection and life after death.

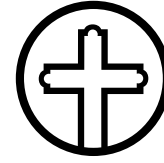
Monday, June 9 – Read Matthew 18:21-22. How many times should we forgive? This a great question. Should we allow ourselves to be abused? In the Jewish interpretation of the law, there were stipulations put on forgiveness. Jesus is saying there are no circumstances a person can put on forgiveness. Jesus is not telling us to put ourselves in danger, but he is putting a great emphasis on value of a human soul. Seven is a perfect number. Seven times seventy or seventy-seven times would be perfection multiplied to meet the circumstance. Who needs your forgiveness? Have you failed to forgive someone because you don't think they deserve it?

Tuesday, June 10 – Read I Corinthians 13. Known as the love passage, the apostle Paul is speaking to the "most excellent way" of relating to one another and to God. There is no spiritual gift more important than love. There is no human value more important than love. Read through the passage again and write in the margin of your Bible those persons who exhibit each of the qualities of love. In what way can you show these qualities to those who are close to you? In what way can you show these qualities to those who you have just met?

Wednesday, June 11 – Read Luke 5:17-26. In this passage Jesus heals a man who was paralyzed. He begins by telling the man his sins are forgiven. The local Pharisees challenge Jesus right to forgive sins. Jesus establishes his authority to forgive sins by telling the man to stand up and walk. All were amazed by the words and actions of Jesus. The Pharisees are worried about right of authority verses the needs of the paralyzed man. Jesus is not concerned about rights. He is moved by compassion for those who are in need. Who in your life is hurting? After reading this passage can you share with them the love that Christ has for them and the compassion God has for their situation?

Thursday, June 12 – Read Matthew 5:23-24. Our relationship with God can be hindered by the broken relationships we have with others. The guilt and remorse we carry are like a bag of rocks that hinder other relationship including our relationship with God. Before your day is done, make a list of those you have harmed. In the next month seek these persons out and seek forgiveness.

Friday, June 13 – Read Matthew 6:9-18. Jesus uses what we call the Lord's Prayer to teach his disciples how to pray. This pray includes asking God to forgive us as we have forgiven others. Pray the Lord's Prayer and make it personal, inserting someone's name as you pray "as I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ who has trespassed against me".



TRIETSCH

July 8, 2008

Study Guide & Daily Readings

## Front Porch Stories

### Gleaning the Truths from the Parables of Jesus

#### Welcome Home

#### Luke 15

Chapter 15 of the gospel of Luke is one of the most well known passages in the bible. In this passage Luke quotes Jesus sharing a series of three parables on the lost. Each of these parables uses a different metaphor to illumine the nature of God's grace. In succession these parables are known as the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son.

#### Background

Luke 15 begins with a challenge by the Pharisees and scribes. They are claiming that Jesus is spending time with tax collectors and sinners. "And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" (Luke 15:2)

To understand this complaint, one must understand the Jewish ceremonial law. Any contact with someone who is deemed "unclean" caused a person to also be unclean. There were a host of reason one might be deemed unclean, but primarily in this case the problem was the Roman occupational forces and the government that accompanied them. Most of them practiced pagan religious rites; they ignored Jewish food laws, and refused to honor the Sabbath.

The definition of a "sinner" was one who was ceremonially "unclean". Ceremonial purity required the blessing of a temple priest after one had admitted the infraction, promised not to continue in this behavior (repentance), and offered a ceremonial sacrifice or rite of cleansing. Any contact with those outside the Jewish community (particularly the Romans), created the need for the priest blessing. Those involved in commerce and government were in constant contact with the Romans. It would be impossible to be ceremonial clean in these situations. Tax collectors in particular (even the honest ones) would not be clean since they could not promise to avoid such contact and therefore would be labeled a "sinner."

This is one example of the general practice of the religious leaders of the day. They were more concerned with ceremonial purity than true spiritual and moral purity. Jesus was directly opposed to this practice as he emphasized spiritual and moral purity. We see this in quotes like, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this mean, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:6-8)

Again and again in the gospels we see Jesus reaching out to those who have been excluded from the worship of God. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes see his compassion as a direct attack on their influence and power. They want to stop Jesus. But Jesus wants us to see that God is not the god of ceremony and exclusion – God is the God of grace, love and purity.

### **Luke 15:3-7**

How many times have we heard the story of the lost sheep? For God, there is not such thing as "acceptable losses". Psalm 23 states, "The Lord is my shepherd." Jesus tells a story about the divine shepherd who is willing to do whatever it takes to find and redeem the lost. In a human since the arithmetic does not add up. How can one be as important as ninety-nine? God's way has no limits.

### **Luke 15:8-10**

The parable of the lost sheep shows us the priority God puts on finding the lost. The parable of the lost coin shows us the lengths God will go to find the lost. These silver coins were equivalent to a Greek drachma, or approximately one day's wage. How long would you search for a day's wage? To what lengths would you go? Would you search for a day? A week? A month? A year?

Both of these parables end with a party. The shepherd and woman invite friends and neighbors to join in the celebration of finding that which has been lost. The irony of this celebration is that sheep often wonder off. Coins often get lost in crowded homes. Losing and finding these things is part of their existence. God's concern for us exceeds our human understanding. The equivalent party in heaven is only the tip of God's love for us. Finally, we see the extent of God's love in the sacrifice of Jesus.

### **Luke 15:11-32 – Welcome Home**

Other than Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, more sermons have been preached on the prodigal son than any other. Clearly Jesus shows us an extravagantly loving and forgiving God. The son does not deserve to be accepted back. Contrary to our human emotional need for judgment, God not only accepts the rebellious son back, but restores him to his place in the family.

Looking at the story there are several points that add meaning. A brief outline of the story looks like this: the son asked for his inheritance, he leaves the home, waste the inheritance, becomes destitute, comes to himself wanting only to be a servant in his father's house, returns home repentant and emotionally broken, instead the

father returns him to family status, throwing a huge party, and finally the story ends with the older brother's dismay and anger over the brother's return.

### **Other notes:**

- Inheritance – the inheritance was given only at the death of the father (no exceptions), the inheritance was divided by the number of brothers plus one, with the eldest brother receiving two shares.
- Giving leave – once a son leaves a home under adverse conditions, he was not to return under any circumstances
- Feeding the pigs – a Jew would understand the disgrace of feeding pigs and eating their food, because a pig was considered an unclean animal
- To kiss – a kiss was an expression of great love, the literal translation of the passage here is "and he kissed him much"
- The robe – The robe was a festive garment, not to be worn while working
- The ring – Gave a person the right to transact family business
- The sandals – Slaves would not have worn sandals
- The fatted calf – Only a few times in a person's life would the fatted calf be killed for a celebration

### **The Elder Brother**

Most scholars point out that the elder brother represents the religious leaders of the day. They have little or no care for those who are outside the religious circles. There is another interpretation of the elder brother's protest in verses 25-32. The elder brother represents our need for justice when we have been wronged. The younger brother rebelled, he wasted what had been given to him, and he defiled himself. For the older brother the sin of his brother is too great to be repaired. The younger brother has compromised everything for which the family stands. To let him back into the fold is to corrupt the family name.

Ceremony, rites, and principles can not compare to the value of a human life to God. God does not need our ceremonies or rites. God is too powerful to be concerned with principles. Love, grace, and the value of a soul is the precious jewel for which God longs.

### **Welcome Home**

Just as the father welcomes the younger son home, God welcomes us home. The younger brother can not reclaim his inheritance. He wasted it. But his life was not over and his future was not to be defined by the mistakes of the past. The parable of the Prodigal Son reminds us that God is the God of second chances. Not matter where we have been or what we have done, we still have a future in God's redeeming love.