

WHAT IT COST TO BRING US HOME**Luke 15:11-32**

Intro: Commenting on the Zephaniah 3 passage Kaitlyn read earlier in the service, Frank Eakin points out that a concept that is often overlooked is the importance of *“the Divine initiative in the God/man relationship. The Bible is a record of God seeking after man in various ways, and not vice versa. God seeks the continuation of his relationship with man even though man rejects him. God does not need man, but man desperately needs his Creator. The majesty of the Creator is seen in the esteem which is placed upon his creation.”*

We never get too far from *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16 do we? God gave, and gave, and gave and it will take all of eternity to realize what it cost to bring us home.

As I told you as I began last week’s message, we are preparing for the launch of LifeGroups by reviewing the first two installments of the Winter 2020 LifeGroup session. I’m doing that in a short series I’ve entitled LIVING THE GOSPEL. Last week we talked about seeing the need for God in a lost culture, and today I want to talk about the difference between irreligion (the lack of religion) and the Gospel, and also religion and the Gospel. Let’s do that by looking at a very familiar passage from Luke, the parable of the Prodigal Son.

(Read Luke 15:11-32)

FB Meyer calls this “the pearl of parables”. And points out that too often we desire God's gifts apart from God. Often a far country is not far in actual distance, but in the alienation of the heart. You may live in a Christian home and have been taken to church from the time you were born and, spiritually, still be in a far country. The younger son in the parable wasted his inheritance in the same way that sin is waste. Meyer powerfully yet simply compares life without God as a far country that is always swept by famine. And this is because *“our soul was made for God and it cannot live on husks”*. Because *“Neither things nor people can really appease our awful hunger if we are away from God.”* We were created for the fatted calf.

Like the wandering son we need to come to ourselves and stand face to face with the waste, ruin and havoc of our sin. And when we do, we turn and then RETURN to find a waiting father who never gave up on us.

But, then there was the son who was always there – because he never left home, but really he was never really there.

This is because, as Donald Miller points out, *“The story of the prodigal son is really that of a father who lost two sons.”* Both sons, the one who strayed and the one who stayed, were lost to the loving father. And the truth is the one who stayed is the more lost because he rebelled against his father’s love in the end.

Nevertheless . . .

Both sons are lost by their deliberate choice

- The younger son began with his choice to break the family ties and to pursue life independently of his father. He wanted to be his own master and he left and squandered everything. A definition of sin is our refusal to use God's gifts for God's glory and to live as his obedient creation, basking in his love.
- This was a reenactment of the fall of humanity found in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation to be like God and that has been the story of humanity ever since.
- The father could have chased after the son, but in this case, the reconciliation had to wait for the son's change of heart. In Luke 15:17 this happens when *“he came to himself”*. He had an Ahaaa! moment. He realized his situation and his loss and his condition and he turned for home. This is a picture of repentance. He no longer needed his father’s things because he knew his need for his father’s love. It was always there, but now he knew his need. This kind of repentance leads to forgiveness.
- As we can see from the welcome home and the celebration party, forgiveness means not only the release from any penalty and guilt; it means also full restoration to sonship. This is a significant part of what the gospel is. One commentator points out how this parable shows God's attitude of love towards sinners since, as he was doing this particular teaching, Jesus was actually on his way to Jerusalem and the Cross. It was what it cost to bring us home.
- As usual, many of the ones hearing Jesus teach here were members of the Pharisees. And Jesus is comparing them to the older brother in their lack of understanding of God's grace. Like the Pharisees, the older son is basing his relationship to his father on achievement and merit and seeking reward for his righteous deeds and faithfulness. He had stayed under his father's roof, but he was as lost as his wayward

brother. He served for reward rather than for love of his father. After all, he had served and obeyed and because of that – in Timothy Keller’s words, he felt his father owed him. And so he had no idea why his father could be so joyful at the return of his little brother.

- But here’s the truth, the joy in in the fact that . . .

We were meant to live in God and God in us

- This was the parable of the lost sons (Notice that is plural). We can be in a far off land, or be close at home and never missing a church service and still be far from God. This is a good picture of the difference between religion and the Gospel.
- To help with this Tim Keller points out there are three ways to live:
 - There is an irreligious way to be your own savior – the son who ran away
 - There is a religious way to be your own savior – the son who stayed
 - There is looking to God for your salvation – the son who came back home realizing his need.
 - Let me unpack them as I finish this out.
- Irreligion is living as you wish and disregarding God's laws. The younger son went the way of self-discovery and self-indulgence. He left the wisdom and guidance and love of his father and went his own way.
 - This is the way of the person who has no time for God – or for any religion at all. It’s my way of the highway. Irreligion says *"I don't have to obey anyone but myself."* This is truly wilderness wandering – and truth be told, this is a life of desperation and loss.
- Religion is avoiding God as one’s Savior by being one’s own savior. This happens by working very hard to be incredibly good and following God’s laws. All of your religion and all of your morality is really a way for you to earn your own salvation rather than relying on God.
 - This is like so many people who go to church, but they don’t really know why, other than “it’s what mom and dad did” or what “we’ve always done before.”
 - This is thinking that religion and morality is what saves you because in that way you feel that God owes you. You are slapping your deeds down on the table in front of the Almighty and in your best, “I’m entitled to this!” voice, you say, “Here’s what I did! Now what are you going to do about it?”
 - Or, putting it simply, religion is, *"I obey, therefore I am accepted by God."*
- The younger son represents irreligion by going his own way and not caring a wit what his father, or anyone else thinks. He is lost even though he thinks he knows where he’s going. The older son represents religion with its moral conformity and moral performance. He does care what people think and he is struggling in a hopeless, uphill battle to do things right. Both want the father's things and not his heart. The one is spiritually lost, far from home, while the other is spiritually lost at home.
- But, fortunately there is that third way which requires, in Keller’s words, *“the initiating love of the father.”* We need to look to the Father for our salvation because he made the way, at infinite cost of his son. He goes on to say *“We need to learn to repent, not only of our own bad things but also for the reason for our good things which is the love of our own righteousness.”* Are you doing good things to earn your salvation, or are you doing good things because of your love for the one who made you righteous by his sacrifice?
- This is the Gospel *"I am accepted by God at infinite cost to Jesus Christ, therefore I obey."* My salvation is through the infinite love of the one who gave everything – the older brother who held nothing back and died for us on the Cross.

Conclusion: We need to see what it cost for the father to bring us home.

Are you wandering in the wilderness, far from God and far from hope?

Are you stuck at home, spinning your wheels in a frustrating cycle of trying to make yourself good enough to earn your way to salvation?

Or are you relying on God to be your Savior? I pray you have taken the third way. If not he’s waiting for you – he’s looking for you to be coming in from the distance. He’s been watching you since you were just a speck on the horizon. He’s also waiting for you to come in from the barn where you’ve been banging around in the darkness trying to find your own way to him. He loves us and he’s ready to have a party to celebrate us home. Amen.

