

Where Is Home?

Part Two, The Prodigal Son Goes Back To The City

A Twenty-First Century Interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Introductory Reading: Jonah 3:10

Text Scriptures: The Book of Jonah, Jonah 2:7-9, Luke 15:11-32

as presented to Peace Mennonite Church, 11001 Midway Road, Dallas, Texas 75229
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In the first part of our story, the prodigal son returned home to find there is no home. The farm had fallen into foreclosure and was auctioned off because the famine that caused him to turn from his profligate ways hit his ancestral birthplace as well.

Wandering the grounds of the homestead he found everything gone, the farm implements, even the furniture of the house where he grew up. And there was no one on the property to inquire what happened. Falling on his knees in despair, his hope crushed, he cries out to God for answers at this tragic turn of events. Ripping his garment he fell on his face on the floor of his old bedroom and lay there for some time weeping, eventually falling into a slumber.

He is awakened in the early evening by a kind old man, the new groundskeeper, who takes the prodigal son into the barn where he stays. Over a modest dinner, the caretaker tells him what little he knows about the sale of the farm to the new absentee owner. Upon learning nothing of the whereabouts of his family, the prodigal son becomes distraught about their fate until the old man calms him down, suggesting a good night's rest will restore his strength. They bed down for the night.

After breakfast in the morning, thanking the caretaker for his hospitality, the prodigal son sets off again for the city, the degenerate town that first brought him ruin, which he thought would be the only place to look for work and find his family. Along the way he overtakes a man dressed in rags with a terrible smell, and, it appeared, talking loudly to himself. The prodigal son considered taking another road when he heard the man cry aloud, "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to thee, into thy holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to thee; what I have vowed I will pay."

Remembering his own repentance, and thinking this might be a holy prophet who could intercede for him regarding his family, the prodigal son introduced himself and struck up a conversation: "Where are you bound, and what is your name?" The strange man, thus interrupted in his prayers, looked at the prodigal son and said: "My name is Jonah, and God has sent me to the city of Nineveh to prophesy destruction to their city for their wicked ways." Jonah then proceeded to tell the prodigal son how, thinking he could run from God, he got on a boat but a great storm came up and the sailors, believing he was the cause of the storm, threw him overboard and was swallowed by a great fish. In the belly of the fish he cried

out to God for mercy, repented, and was deposited on the beach to complete the task now before him.

The prodigal son then related his story to Jonah, how he left home and squandered his wealth in this same wicked city. And then, when the money ran out and he found himself working like a slave, came to his senses and went home to seek forgiveness from his father only to find the family had lost the family farm in the present famine. He asked Jonah if God may have a word for him as to the whereabouts of his family. Jonah told him that the famine was only the beginning of sorrows, because, if they are in the city, he must find them soon because God is going to destroy it in forty days. The prodigal son thanked him and ran ahead into Nineveh to find his family.

The prodigal son, knowing his time was limited, prayed to God to obtain work that would also help him find his family. God blessed him and he found work as a delivery boy to the various markets in the city. He thought that, as he went on his delivery rounds, he could ask the various vendors if they had seen his family. But shortly after he arrived in Nineveh, the king, hearing Jonah's prophecy, proclaimed a citywide fast and a time of repentance in the hopes of turning away God's wrath. The markets closed and he lost his job.

Losing all hope of ever finding his family, and in fear of the impending destruction of the city, the prodigal son determined to return to the family farm hoping to at least find shelter in the barn, and maybe a little work. At the city gates he saw Jonah also leaving the city. Jonah, seeing the prodigal son, said to him: "You have found favor in God's eyes for your repentance. You will find your father begging outside the city gates. He will not recognize you because, losing the farm, losing the family, losing you, he has lost his mind. Take him to the hospital nearby and they will care for him until he comes to himself." The prodigal son was overjoyed, but was also fearful, and said to Jonah: "How can I leave my father here to be destroyed, and how can I lead him back to the farm? What am I supposed to do?"

Jonah told the prodigal son not to worry that God had repented of the evil He said he would do to Nineveh because of the repentance of the entire city. But the prodigal son saw that Jonah was angry and asked him what was the matter. Jonah said he was angry with God because of all the pain and abuse he had experienced being called by God to prophesy Nineveh's destruction and then changed his mind to not destroy it. Jonah then left the prodigal son after showing him where his father lay at the city gates. The prodigal son did as Jonah told him and returned into the city to see if he could regain his delivery job to pay his father's hospital bill and to continue looking for his mother and brother. He resumed his job and his search for his family. Nineveh, repented of its evil ways, was now a different city. It was now safe to be out alone at night. This gave the prodigal son additional time to look for his family.

Early one evening after dinner, he was walking through a market near his apartment and saw a coat hanging on a post for sale. Although the light was fading he immediately recognized it as the coat his father gave his mother on their fortieth

wedding anniversary. He couldn't believe his good fortune and engaged the shopkeeper thus: "I am interested in this coat, but it is obviously not a new coat. How did you obtain it?" The shopkeeper told him he had purchased it in a lot from an auction house nearby. The next morning was his day off so he went to the auction house and spoke with the owner who informed him the woman who sold him the coat worked at the laundry down the street. She lived in an apartment he owned and gave him the coat in part payment for rent. Thanking the man, the prodigal son rushed out of the auction house to find his mother and brother, singing God's praises as he went.

Finding the laundry, and trembling with anticipation, he entered, and seeing his mother and brother standing at the counter, collapsed on the floor, sobbing. His mother and brother, recognizing him, rushed to comfort him with great emotion. Through the tearful reunion the prodigal son told them his whole story, including finding his father and putting him in the hospital. His mother then shared how, in a moment of anger and despair at the loss of the farm, and full of selfishness and prideful arrogance, blamed it all on her husband and abandoned him there at the farm, taking the son into the city to stay with relatives and find work. While in Nineveh she had seen Jonah prophesying the city's destruction for its wickedness and preaching repentance. Recalling all this, her heart was struck with grief and repentance as she came to the realization she caused the breakdown of her own husband, and, had her son not come to his rescue, he may have died alone in his illness outside the city gates. The prodigal son comforted his mother and they made arrangements for him to stay with them and for all of them to go see his father in the morning.

Arriving at the hospital, the prodigal son's mother once again began lamenting the evil she committed against her husband, repenting and crying aloud to God for mercy upon the family. Entering his room, she rushed to him and lay her head on his chest sobbing, confessing her sins to her husband and begging his forgiveness. The prodigal son's father opened his eyes, and, seeing his wife there hugging him tightly, crying out to God, and his two sons by his side, immediately regained his senses. The doctor and nurses were called in to examine him and declaring him miraculously cured, released him to his family. They returned to their apartment and the prodigal son's mother prepared a modest but bountiful feast. While they were eating, the father told them they would buy back the farm. Everyone was incredulous, thinking he was still suffering from his breakdown. But he told them that while he was in the hospital God had spoken to him in a dream, reminding him of a promise he had made long ago. It turns out that when he first bought the farm God had told him to bury the cash profits of his first seven harvests because one day he would need it. His father had at first dismissed God's call but later repented and obeyed, burying the money behind the barn. Over the years he had forgotten all about it.

Because of each of their repentances, God not only restored their family and their farm, he taught them that home is love, and that true love is found only in a repentant and contrite heart.