

THE PRODIGAL SON



Christ to the World Ministries

Christ to the World Ministries is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to sharing the gospel of Christ with the world through radio Bible dramas and oral and printed Bible studies. For additional information, see our website at www.christtotheworld.com.

Writer: Art Criscoe

Artist: Ruth Bochte

Advisor: Dr. LeRoy Ford

Bible Editor: Dr. Lorin Cranford

Copyright 2006 by **Christ to the World Ministries**. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publisher.



CHRIST TO THE WORLD MINISTRIES

The Prodigal Son

Read Luke 15:1-32 in your Bible.

Wherever Jesus went he attracted great crowds of people. Tax collectors and sinners especially gathered about him. They gladly received his teachings about the love and forgiveness of God. The Pharisees and teachers of the law also followed Jesus, but they came to find fault with his teachings. They criticized Jesus because he welcomed the tax collectors and sinners and ate with them.

Jesus answered his critics by relating three stories, or parables. A parable illustrates a spiritual truth in story form. Jesus told lots of stories and the common people loved them. They understood the stories and could identify with them. The three parables Jesus told on this occasion involved a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy. The shepherd searched for the lost sheep until he found it. The woman searched for her lost coin until she found it, and the father of the lost boy gladly received him when he returned home. In each case the story ended with a celebration and great rejoicing. The three parables teach that God loves sinners and that his grace and mercy extend to every person.

The parable of the prodigal son involves his leaving home and what happened to him, his return home, and the reaction of the older brother. In telling about the older brother, Jesus held a mirror up for the Pharisees and teachers of the law to see themselves.

The Son Left Home

The boy asked his father for his inheritance. Usually the dividing of an estate among the heirs took place upon the death of the father. The boy could not wait; he wanted it then. The disrespect shown to his father did not bother him. The father did not refuse his son's request. He divided the estate and gave the boy his share.

The boy converted his inheritance to cash. He then packed his belongings and left home quickly. Anxious to get away, he took his wealth and journeyed to a distant land. No doubt he acquired new friends since he had lots of money to spend. He squandered his wealth with wild living. Our name for the parable comes from the boy's reckless and extravagant behavior. The boy soon wasted all of his money; it did not last long. Neither did his friends. The boy found himself all alone far away from home in a distant land with no money.

The situation became worse. A great famine swept over the land, and the boy began to starve. He got a job from a farmer who sent him out to care for his pigs. This indicated the level to which he had sunk, for Jews considered pigs to be unclean and off-limits. The boy no longer cared; hunger pangs gripped him. He even wanted to eat the pods fed to the pigs, but no person gave him anything to eat. The boy could sink no lower.

The Son Returned Home

A turning point occurred at the boy's lowest point. "*He came to his senses*" (Luke 15:17). He remembered home. He began to think of his father and all the scenes of the home place. He thought of the servants who worked for his father.

He knew they had food. Homesickness swept over him. He faced himself. He knew he had sinned against God and against his father. Recognizing himself as completely unfit and no longer worthy to be called a son, he resolved to go home. He turned from the pigpen and began the long journey home.

The Older Brother Complained

The boy trudged on, night and day, for many weary miles. Days passed. As the boy neared home, no doubt he wondered about what kind of reception he would receive. He rehearsed in his mind what he would say to his father.

We come to the very best part of the story: "*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him*" (Luke 15:20). The boy did not even get to finish the confession he had rehearsed. The father did not receive him as a servant but as a son. He ordered the best robe to be put on him; he put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Rejoicing broke out. The fattened calf, reserved for a special occasion, was killed for a feast. Everyone began to celebrate.

Everyone began to celebrate--except the older brother. In the field working, he heard the music and dancing. He returned to the house and inquired of a servant the reason for the celebration. When told that his brother had returned, he became angry and refused to enter the house. The father came out and in a gentle, loving way explained the reason for the rejoicing. "*This brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found*" (Luke 15:32).

Conclusion

Jesus had the father in the story run to meet his son, something considered undignified in that culture for an older man to do. Jesus wanted to show the teachers of the law and Pharisees, and us, God's love, forgiveness, and eagerness to receive outcasts and sinners. Jesus said that heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. (Read Luke 15:7, 10.)

The Bible teaches that we are sinners. But God loves us and sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins. We receive Christ as our Savior by turning from our sin and placing our faith and trust in him.

Pray this prayer: "*Dear God, I know that I'm a sinner. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead and is alive today. I now turn from my sins. I am placing my faith and trust in Jesus alone to be my Savior and to forgive me. I receive Jesus into my life as my Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I will follow Jesus. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving me and for coming into my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*"

Welcome into God's family! Share with others that you have received Christ as your Savior and Lord. Ask for baptism in a local church as a public expression of your faith. If there is no church near you, start a church by gathering a group of persons in your home and worship together on a regular basis. Read your Bible and pray each day. Tell others what Christ has done for you and what he can do for them.