

Worthy or Unworthy

Submitted by Minister Bernice Cole

Luke 15: 11-13 (NIV)

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So, he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

This Scripture is often called the parable of the *prodigal son*. Many today use the designation “prodigal” to speak of the rebellion of the younger son. The word’s meaning is associated with reckless waste and spending.

This parable is the third in a series in Luke. The other parables describe a lost sheep and a lost coin. All three parables include similar themes: (1) something valuable is lost, (2) the lost thing is found, and (3) there is a celebration.

Jesus told these parables as a response to criticism from Pharisees and teachers of the law. These groups were upset with Jesus because He “welcomes” sinners and eats with them.”

Inheritance was extremely important. The father controlled the land and money in the family. The oldest son customarily inherited the largest portion of the family estate, a double share or two thirds if there were no sons but daughters instead. Moses ruled that they could inherit the estate.

What is unusual here is that the younger son initiated the division of the estate. This showed arrogant disregard for his father’s authority as head of the family.

The younger son, like many who are rebellious, and immature, wanted to be free to live as he pleased, and had to hit rock bottom before he came to his senses. It often takes great sorrow and tragedy to cause people to look to the only One who can help them.

It was hard for the older brother to accept his younger brother when he returned. In the story of the lost son, the father’s response is contrast to the older brother. The father forgave because he was filled with love. The son refused to forgive because he was bitter about the injustice of it all. His resentment rendered him just as lost to the father’s love as the younger brother had been.

The older brother represented the pharisees, who were angry and resentful that sinners were being welcomed in God’s kingdom. After all, the pharisees must have thought, we have sacrificed and done so much *for* God. How easy it is to resent God’s gracious forgiveness of others whom we consider to be far worse sinners than ourselves.

The father is a picture of God's great love for sinners. When we feel the level of unworthiness as in this story, perhaps, we too can be assured of God's love and be reminded that God's love is always greater than our unworthiness.

Consider this for a moment: When our self-righteousness gets in the way of rejoicing when others come to Jesus, we are no better than the Pharisee. Do not let anything keep you from forgiving others.