

## MARCH 30, 2019 SUMMARY SERMON-JOHN TSCHUDY

### SCRIPTURE LESSON 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21, LUKE 15:11-32

I find it a bit ironic that this well-known parable is an example of how biblical interpretations change throughout time. When I started out in ministry Luke 15:11-32 was usually divided into two separate lessons. There was Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-24. The next week or so the Parable of the Elder Brother Luke 15: 25-32 would come up. The emphasis was always placed on the Prodigal Son and the lesson of forgiveness it taught, while less attention was paid to the Elder brother. In recent years the interpretation was changed to focus on the two brothers equally and the whole text became "The Parable of the Two Brothers or Sons." Now it seems like the interpretation is again separating the two brothers but keeping the equal importance of the two lessons their situation teaches. I mention this so that we realize that biblical interpretation is a living thing that changes through time and isn't set in stone. It goes back to the idea that God is still speaking to us and we need to approach the Bible with an open mind, in light of the new things we are learning about it and God's creation.

One of the two sons takes his share of his father's inheritance and knowing the farm will go to his elder brother, goes to live his life in another place. He soon finds that this isn't as easy and fun as it sounds and ends up living in poverty and filth. He decides to go home, ask his father to forgive him and take him on as a servant or slave. Jesus based his parable on real life things that happened so we need to take this as a warning. Grown children leaving home and then returning is not a new things. It's biblical so be prepared. On his return his father not only welcomes him back but restores him to the rightful place of the younger son. The point of this part of the parable is to illustrate to us the love God has for those children that stray from God's way and how God is always willing to forgive them and restore them to their proper relationship with God, with a great celebration. This idea of being in a relationship with God like parent and child is important.

When the Elder brother finds out what has happened he resents it. He feels that his father doesn't appreciate his faithfulness and he is afraid that in the end he will get less from the estate because more will go to his brother, who has already wasted his share. His father's reply is he shouldn't worry, his faithfulness will be rewarded. He is asked to understand how his father feels. The son he thought was dead is now alive and the celebration is as much about that as it is about the Son's return. The lesson for us is of course that God rejoices when a sinner repents and returns to faithfully following the will of God. Further there is plenty of God's love to go around for those who remain faithful to God and those who return to God's way after straying.

According to Paul we are not to judge each other from a human point of view, which is what the elder brother is doing. Rather while Christ become fully human to help us understand God's way, we are to look at each other as a new creation in Christ. Another way of saying this is to understand that we look at each other not as creatures of this world but rather citizen's of the world to come, living in this world. Paul says that we are to be like Ambassadors for Christs, examples of how Christ calls us to live. The argument is that God is working through us to help the people of this world understand how God's wants us to live. Our salvation comes by our following Christ's way that was demonstrated to us when Christ, living a totally human life, did so perfectly obeying God and God's way through faithful living.

That includes as the two brothers demonstrate, if we do fail to live up to God's way, even to the worst possible extent, we can be forgiven and God will welcome back into the family of God. But also if we are totally faithful to God, God's love is great enough to welcome the sinner back to their rightful place and give the faithful all that they are entitled to. This too is part of seeing each other as equal children of God and not judging each other or being afraid that God isn't capable of loving us just because of how others are included in God's love. A part of having the saving faith in God is trusting in God's love for all God's children and trusting that God will be fair and just with us all.