

FRUIT #1: LOVE **(Luke 15:11-32)**

1.20.19

INTRODUCTION

[SHOW JESUS] — fruit of the Spirit the outcome of being indwelt by the Spirit.

TEXT: LUKE 15:11-32 (SUMMARIZE)

The context of this parable: *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man (Jesus) welcomes sinners and eats with them” — Luke 15:1-2.*

Attitude of religious leaders (Pharisees and teachers of the law): **Luke 18:9-14 (the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector — summarize).**

Parable: a simple story used to teach a moral or spiritual lesson. Jesus told approximately 40 parables during His earthly ministry.

STORY NOTES

Although there were instances of fathers settling their estate with their sons in order to turn over financial management and thus retire, it was an unusual and even inappropriate request from the younger son for his share of his father’s estate. In fact, this would have been considered a terrible breach of family etiquette and would have brought an incredible amount of shame to the home. Estates were intended to be settled upon the father’s death. The fact that the son initiated this request shows a blatant, arrogant disregard for his father and his authority. Note the fact that he does not ask but demands this from his father. He is essentially telling him that he wished his father was dead.

When the younger son left, he had no intention of ever returning. But his life of “wild” living brought about a different outcome as his lifestyle squandered his inheritance and left him destitute. Even more than in poverty, there was the humiliation of a Jew tending an unclean animal like a pig and the additional shame of actually considering eating the food that those pigs had touched.

REPENTANCE = change of mind, change in one’s way of thinking that results in different beliefs and a change in the direction of one’s life (U-TURN).

Father saw the returning son “from a long way off,” indicating that he was continually looking for his return. The father acknowledged the son’s free will in not chasing after him, but also showed great patience in waiting for him.

Son confessed his sin and his deserved status. He put his repentance into action by returning home and confessing to his father.

The father was the injured party in this story, but you’d never know it from his response. Totally ignoring cultural protocol, he ran to his son the moment he saw and recognized him. No negative responses from the father but rather: (1) compassion, (2) love, (3) celebration and (4) restoration as his child (robe of distinction, signet ring [symbolizing family authority and the son’s right to conduct business in the father’s name], and sandals [signifying family status — slaves were often barefoot]). No probation, no “wait-and-see,” just immediate and complete restoration.

The joy of the father reflects the way with which God receives repentant sinners: “[T]here is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” — *Jesus Christ, Luke 15:10*.

Compare with the older brother’s attitudes: (1) surprise at the return of his sinning brother, (2) offended and jealous of his father’s celebration, (3) angered at his father’s forgiving love, (4) promoting of his own goodness, and (5) focus on his brother’s past sins rather than his brother’s repentant return. The older brother is representative of the religious leadership and their self-righteousness. Ironically, he becomes as separated from his father’s love as his younger brother had been.

What the leadership was missing: (1) the opportunity for a close relationship with God, (2) the generosity of God’s grace, (3) God’s joy at the salvation of others, and (4) the profound transformation of a repentant sinner.

To top it off, Christ reminded them, in making this story about two brothers that, despite the sin of the younger one, they were still brothers. The leadership always refused to accept “sinners” as their “brothers.” The callousness of the religious attitudes is in stark contrast to the unrestrained love of Christ’s attitude.

DEFINING THE STORY

Looking at the first “fruit of the Spirit”: love. Focus on the father’s love:

First, the father’s love was **FAITHFUL**. The son’s attitude did not end his father’s love. The son’s absence did not end his father’s love. In fact, we see the faithfulness of his love in the patience with which his father waited for him to return. Jesus tells us that, “[W]hile he (the son) was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him” — *Jesus Christ, Luke 15:20b*. We get the sense that his father had been looking for his return ever since he left. That is the patience that Peter was talking about when he wrote: *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* — *II Peter 3:9*.

Second, the father’s love was **FREE**. The son tried to give his prepared speech to his father, but his father ignored his words. His love could never be earned; his love was simply always there because this was his child. The father’s love was centered in grace — “undeserved favor” — that was not based on any kind of merit. Paul told us the same thing: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast* — *Paul, Ephesians 2:8-9*.

Third, the father’s love was reflected in **FORGIVENESS**. The forgiveness is reflected in the restoration that takes place (the robe, the ring, the sandals, the celebration) as though no sin had been committed. It is obvious from the father’s actions: His son’s actions are forgiven — and forgotten. Just like the Bible says: *[A]s far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us* — *David, Psalm 103:12* AND *“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more”* — *God speaking, Isaiah 43:25*. And there were no sins to the son’s account, then why not celebrate?

APPLICATION OF THE STORY

So why is love so important? Why is it the first fruit Paul mentions? Three reasons:

First, love is the most immediate reflection of God. John said it so well: ***God is love — I John 4:8b.*** That verse is so important because it says something much deeper than just the fact that “God loves.” It describes love as the very essence of God’s character, the very foundation of who he is. The Greek word is “agape,” often translated as God love, which is completely appropriate. His is the love of intelligent comprehension united with corresponding blessed purpose. It is how God has loved the world — comprehending and understanding all the evil yet making it His purpose to remove it. It is how God loves us, and the basis for the salvation that all Christians claim and the entire world has been offered.

Second, love is so important because it is how disciples of Christ are recognized. For Christians, love is literally meant to be our ID — how we identify ourselves. Jesus said so Himself: ***“[E]veryone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” — Jesus Christ, John 13:35.*** And what is that love supposed to look like? In a word: Jesus. [JOHN 13:34]

Third, love is so important because it is the single most unnatural thing for us to show. Sin is based on selfishness, on what’s going to be best for me, on what’s in it for me. Sin turns us inward. Love is outward. It is always about what’s best for everyone around me, about what’s in it for everybody else. That’s why the New Testament mentions it so many times. It is the basis for how we show something completely different to the world as a reflection of our life in Christ. It is the basis for showing how different we have become in Christ. In fact, Paul went so far as to say it like this: ***The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love — Paul, Galatians 5:6b.***

One of the great outcomes of love is what we call the “one-another” verses — the things we do for each other as a direct consequence of loving one another. Even though “one another” is two words in English, it is one word in Greek — *allelon* (AL-LAY^-LONE). And that word is found 100 times in 94 verses in the New Testament — and 47 of those instances are contained in instructions to the church. Many of those verses (along with the parallel “each other”) are enclosed in your bulletins.

CONCLUSION

Why is love so important? Love sees every moment as an opportunity for ministry — to present the gospel of God through Jesus Christ through our words, our actions and our attitudes. All that matters for us as a church is “showing Jesus.”

But one might ask the question: How can love be commanded? How can someone command my feelings, my emotions, to be a certain way for someone else? The answer is this:

COMMITMENT