

## 207 *Who's prodigal now?*

Have you come across this idea where, each day, you sit and write out, in a notebook, ten verses of one of the Gospels? I love it. It means you have to go very slowly over the verses and really absorb them, and I'm constantly amazed by how often I see something I've never noticed before.

The past two days has been Luke 15:11-32, probably the most life-changing parable for me these past few exciting years, and although I've written about it often, it bore in on me yet again and so I wanted to write about it, perhaps referring to it as 'revision'. (And when I checked to see what I wrote about last time,<sup>[206]</sup> guess what *that* featured!)

So, I wonder if anyone 'theological' could help me. I would dearly love to find a written sermon on this passage from the early centuries of the church's life. I'm willing to bet that it focuses more on the prodigal love of God and less on 'the prodigal son', as we call this famous parable.

In any case, why don't we call it 'the parable of the self-righteous son'?!

My guess is that the early-church sermon would focus more on the ridiculous over-the-top love of the father, ignoring social conventions, racing down the road, long robes hitched up, hugging his smelly, pig-stained son, ignoring his 'Father, I have sinned' speech, ordering a party.

And focusing on the way the father 'goes outside' to the other son. Again, ignoring social conventions, the host leaves the party, to draw in his other son.

Anyway, as I wrote out those verses, I thought about the younger son's motives. Did he **really** realise the weight of his sin? Or was it more that 'and he began to be in need' – he was starving, and having to feed **pigs** of all things!

The Father wants us to come into his love in any way we're willing. Well, maybe God would prefer if our theology were more correct, but God is 'patient, not wanting anyone to perish', and will use anyone prepared to help draw people into that love, even when they are wrong.

No, for my money this is about God's totally consuming desire to get his son(s) back, whatever the cost, and however little they were motivated to inch in the vague direction of home.

And what I really love about our church is that we're so totally obsessed by the love of God that people who don't even attend the church are attracted by that love. So, non-church-goers invite their friends to Toddler Tunes on a Tuesday morning, where Sue and I serve tea and buns, and the children, parents, grandparents and child-minders play with toys in the chancel, while other mostly (now) single, older folk sit and chat.

Call me theologically careless if you like, but I just want people to know God's love so that, when they 'begin to be in need', they will know where they can come.

Paul Bev. 20.5.22