

"The Prodigal God – Sermon 9"

Based largely on "The Prodigal God" By Timothy Keller

Prepared by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus

Preached on the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 15

DATE: June 20, 2010

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

For the past two months we have been studying Jesus' parable of the two lost sons from Luke 15. If we read the parable in light of the Bible's sweeping theme of exile and home-coming, we will understand that Jesus has given us more than a moving account of individual redemption... He has retold the story of the whole human race and promised nothing less than hope for the world. In Jesus' parable the younger brother goes off into a different country expecting a better life, but is disappointed. He begins to want for home, remembering the food in his Father's house... so do we all.

Home exercises a powerful influence over human life. Foreign born Americans spend billions annually to visit the communities in which they were born. Children who never find a place where they feel they belong carry an incapacity for attachment into their adult lives. Many of us have fond memories of times, periods, and places where we felt we were truly home. However if we ever have an opportunity to get back to the places we remember so fondly we are usually disappointed. I remember returning from my honeymoon – some 20 years ago now... My parents had decided to move out of my child-hood home and into an apartment. They gave me the last key to the home and said, "We've already moved out but there is still a box of your stuff in the front hall of the house. Take the box and leave the key on the kitchen counter and lock the door as you leave." I remember opening the door to the house and being met with an echoing sound of emptiness. The furniture, the curtains, the pictures, and most of all, the people, were gone. My heart sank; there was a lump in my throat. I realized all that I had left were memories.

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them. We prepare for holidays hoping that finally this year, the gathering of the family at this important place will deliver the experience of warmth, joy, comfort and love that they want from it. But these events almost always fail crushed under the weight of our impossible expectations.

There seems to be a sense then in which we are all like the younger brother. We are all exiles, always longing for home. We are always traveling never arriving. The houses and families we actually inhabit are just ends along the way, but they aren't home. Home continues to evade us.

Why would home be so powerful and yet so elusive for us? The answer can be found as we answer one of the most pervasive themes of the Bible. In the beginning of the book of Genesis we learn the reason why all people feel like exiles, like we aren't really home. We are told in Genesis that we were created to live in the garden of God. That was the world we were built for. A place in which there was no parting from love, no decay or disease. It was all these things because it was life lived before the face of God – in his presence. There we were to adore and serve His infinite majesty, and to know, enjoy, and reflect his infinite beauty. That was our original home. The true country we were made for.

However the Bible teaches that, as in Jesus' parable, God was the Father of that home and we chafed under his authority. We wanted to live without God's interference and so we turned away and became alienated from him and lost our home for the same reason the younger brother lost his. The result was exile. The bible says that we have been wandering as spiritual exiles ever since, that is, we have been living in a world that no longer fits our deepest longings. Though we long for bodies that run and are not weary we have become subject to disease, aging, and death. Though we need love that lasts, all our relationships are subject to the inevitable entropy of time and they crumble in our hands. Even people that stay true to us, die and leave us, or we die and leave them. Though we long to make a difference in the world through our work we experience endless frustration, we never fully realize our hopes and dreams. We may work hard to re-create the home we have lost but it only exists in the presence of the heavenly Father from which we have fled.

This theme is played out again and again in the Bible. After Adam and Eve's exile from the ultimate home, their son Cain was forced to restlessly wander the earth because he murdered his brother Abel. Later, Jacob cheated his father and brother and fled into exile for years. After that Jacob's son Joseph and his family were taken from their homeland into Egypt because of a famine. There the Israelites were enslaved until under Moses they returned to their ancestral

home. Finally the whole nation of Israel was exiled again, taken captive to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezer. It is no coincidence that story after story contains the pattern of exile. The message of the Bible is that the human race is a band of exiles trying to come home. The parable of the prodigal son is about everyone of us.

The younger brother in the parable knows that a successful return is not inevitable. Why? His sins have created a barrier and he does not know how that wall can be breached. He knows he might be rejected and forced to stay in exile. In the same way the Bible shows how high the barriers are for our own home-coming as a human race.

All the mini exodus' and mini home-comings told of in the Bible failed in the end to deliver the final home-coming that everyone longed for. Why? One reason was the brokenness within human beings. Israel in particular and the human race in general was still mired in selfishness, pride, and sin. We are oppressed by conflicts in our own heart. We need a radical change in our very nature.

The second reason is the brokenness around human beings. There is more to this state of exile than just human moral evil. According to the Bible we live in a natural world that is now fallen. We were not made for a world of disease and natural disaster, a world in which everything decays and dies including ourselves.

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What had happened? Jesus had come to save all of us from sin, evil and death itself. He came to bring the human race home! Therefore he did not come in strength but in weakness. He came and experienced the exile that we deserved. He was expelled from the presence of the Father, thrust into the darkness, the uttermost despair of spiritual alienation – in our place. He took upon himself the full curse of human

rebellion, cosmic homelessness, so that we could be welcomed into our true home.

Jesus not only died but he rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus broke the power of death – Hebrews 2:14 – Because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin with his death, he has achieved victory of the forces of death, decay and disorder that keep the world from being our true home. Someday he will return to make this victory complete.

At the end of the story of the prodigal sons there is a feast of homecoming. So too at the end of Revelation. At the end of history there is a feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb – Revelation 19. The Lamb is Jesus who was sacrificed for the sins of the world so that we could be pardoned and brought home.

This feast happens in the new Jerusalem, the city of God that comes down out of heaven to fill the earth. Revelation 21-22. We are told that the very presence of God is in this city and so is the tree of life whose leaves now affect the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2 The tree of life of course was in the Garden of Eden. So at the end of history the whole earth has become the garden of God again. Death, decay, and suffering are gone. The nations are no longer at war.

Jesus, unlike the founder of any other faith, holds out hope for the ordinary human life. Our future is not an ethereal impersonal form of consciousness. We will not float through the air but rather eat and embrace, sing, laugh, and dance in the Kingdom of God. In degrees of power, glory, and joy that we can't at present imagine.

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The second reason is the brokenness around human beings. There is more to this state of exile than just human moral evil. According to the Bible we live in a natural world that is now fallen. We were not made for a world of disease and natural disaster, a world in which everything decays and dies including ourselves.

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All the mini exodus' and mini home-comings told of in the Bible failed in the end to deliver the final home-coming that everyone longed for. Why? One reason was the brokenness within human beings. Israel in particular and the human race in general was still mired in selfishness, pride, and sin. We are oppressed by conflicts in our own heart. We need a radical change in our very nature.

The second reason is the brokenness around human beings. There is more to this state of exile than just human moral evil. According to the Bible we live in a natural world that is now fallen. We were not made for a world of disease and natural disaster, a world in which everything decays and dies including ourselves.

This world as it now exists is not the home we longed for. A real final home-coming would mean a radical change, not only in human nature, but in the very fabric of the material world. How can such a thing be accomplished?

Jesus declared that he had come to accomplish this! He was bringing in the Kingdom of God. The people crowded eagerly around to observe and hear him. He was born not in a palace behind a royal curtain but in a stable feed trough on the straw far from home. During his ministry he wandered settling nowhere and said, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20) He remained completely outside the social networks of political and economic power. He did not even seek academic or religious credentials. Finally at the end of his life he was crucified outside the gate of the city, a powerful symbol of rejection, by the community of exile. And as he died he said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me." Matthew 27:46. A tremendous cry of spiritual dereliction and homelessness.

What had happened? Jesus had come to save all of us from sin, evil and death itself. He came to bring the human race home! Therefore he did not come in strength but in weakness. He came and experienced the exile that we deserved. He was expelled from the presence of the Father, thrust into the darkness, the uttermost despair of spiritual alienation – in our place. He took upon himself the full curse of human

rebellion, cosmic homelessness, so that we could be welcomed into our true home.

Jesus not only died but he rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus broke the power of death – Hebrews 2:14 – Because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin with his death, he has achieved victory of the forces of death, decay and disorder that keep the world from being our true home. Someday he will return to make this victory complete.

At the end of the story of the prodigal sons there is a feast of homecoming. So too at the end of Revelation. At the end of history there is a feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb – Revelation 19. The Lamb is Jesus who was sacrificed for the sins of the world so that we could be pardoned and brought home.

This feast happens in the new Jerusalem, the city of God that comes down out of heaven to fill the earth. Revelation 21-22. We are told that the very presence of God is in this city and so is the tree of life whose leaves now affect the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2 The tree of life of course was in the Garden of Eden. So at the end of history the whole earth has become the garden of God again. Death, decay, and suffering are gone. The nations are no longer at war.

Jesus, unlike the founder of any other faith, holds out hope for the ordinary human life. Our future is not an ethereal impersonal form of consciousness. We will not float through the air but rather eat and embrace, sing, laugh, and dance in the Kingdom of God. In degrees of power, glory, and joy that we can't at present imagine.

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"The Prodigal God – Sermon 9"

Based largely on "The Prodigal God" By Timothy Keller

Prepared by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus

Preached on the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 15

DATE: June 20, 2010

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

For the past two months we have been studying Jesus' parable of the two lost sons from Luke 15. If we read the parable in light of the Bible's sweeping theme of exile and home-coming, we will understand that Jesus has given us more than a moving account of individual redemption... He has retold the story of the whole human race and promised nothing less than hope for the world. In Jesus' parable the younger brother goes off into a different country expecting a better life, but is disappointed. He begins to want for home, remembering the food in his Father's house... so do we all.

Home exercises a powerful influence over human life. Foreign born Americans spend billions annually to visit the communities in which they were born. Children who never find a place where they feel they belong carry an incapacity for attachment into their adult lives. Many of us have fond memories of times, periods, and places where we felt we were truly home. However if we ever have an opportunity to get back to the places we remember so fondly we are usually disappointed. I remember returning from my honeymoon – some 20 years ago now... My parents had decided to move out of my child-hood home and into an apartment. They gave me the last key to the home and said, "We've already moved out but there is still a box of your stuff in the front hall of the house. Take the box and leave the key on the kitchen counter and lock the door as you leave." I remember opening the door to the house and being met with an echoing sound of emptiness. The furniture, the curtains, the pictures, and most of all, the people, were gone. My heart sank; there was a lump in my throat. I realized all that I had left were memories.

Home then, is a powerful but elusive concept. The strong feelings that surround it reveal some deep longing within us for a place that actually fits and suits us. A place where we can be or perhaps find our true selves. Yet it seems like no place or family actually ever satisfies these yearnings, though many situations arouse them. Many people have shared with me how disappointing Christmas and Thanksgiving are to

them. We prepare for holidays hoping that finally this year, the gathering of the family at this important place will deliver the experience of warmth, joy, comfort and love that they want from it. But these events almost always fail crushed under the weight of our impossible expectations.

There seems to be a sense then in which we are all like the younger brother. We are all exiles, always longing for home. We are always traveling never arriving. The houses and families we actually inhabit are just ends along the way, but they aren't home. Home continues to evade us.

Why would home be so powerful and yet so elusive for us? The answer can be found as we answer one of the most pervasive themes of the Bible. In the beginning of the book of Genesis we learn the reason why all people feel like exiles, like we aren't really home. We are told in Genesis that we were created to live in the garden of God. That was the world we were built for. A place in which there was no parting from love, no decay or disease. It was all these things because it was life lived before the face of God – in his presence. There we were to adore and serve His infinite majesty, and to know, enjoy, and reflect his infinite beauty. That was our original home. The true country we were made for.

However the Bible teaches that, as in Jesus' parable, God was the Father of that home and we chafed under his authority. We wanted to live without God's interference and so we turned away and became alienated from him and lost our home for the same reason the younger brother lost his. The result was exile. The bible says that we have been wandering as spiritual exiles ever since, that is, we have been living in a world that no longer fits our deepest longings. Though we long for bodies that run and are not weary we have become subject to disease, aging, and death. Though we need love that lasts, all our relationships are subject to the inevitable entropy of time and they crumble in our hands. Even people that stay true to us, die and leave us, or we die and leave them. Though we long to make a difference in the world through our work we experience endless frustration, we never fully realize our hopes and dreams. We may work hard to re-create the home we have lost but it only exists in the presence of the heavenly Father from which we have fled.

This theme is played out again and again in the Bible. After Adam and Eve's exile from the ultimate home, their son Cain was forced to restlessly wander the earth because he murdered his brother Abel. Later, Jacob cheated his father and brother and fled into exile for years. After that Jacob's son Joseph and his family were taken from their homeland into Egypt because of a famine. There the Israelites were enslaved until under Moses they returned to their ancestral

home. Finally the whole nation of Israel was exiled again, taken captive to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezer. It is no coincidence that story after story contains the pattern of exile. The message of the Bible is that the human race is a band of exiles trying to come home. The parable of the prodigal son is about everyone of us.

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