*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 19 - 24

“The Lost Older Son”

**Monday, September 19 Luke 15:25-32**

*“The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in’”*

In its original setting the parable portrays the prideful attitude of the Pharisees in the person of the older brother. They stand close to God, at least so it appears. Yet they are really on the outside, for they don’t choose to embrace God’s promises by acknowledging God’s goodness in terms of the forgiveness Jesus offers to all. The picture of the older brother has value today in depicting how those who perceive themselves as close to God should respond to the lost. The parable invites us to consider the Pharisees’ attitude and reject their sense of self-righteous opposition to the prodigal’s return.

The text also warns us through the older brother that activity for God by itself is not the same as knowing him through a relationship grounded in a humble turning to him. The older brother sees God more as a taskmaster who uses his service rather than as a gracious Father. When we come to God on the basis of his grace, rather than trying to earn his favor, we find the arms of God ready to welcome us in celebration.

*I rejoice, Lord, that you offer grace and forgiveness to all who desire it. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 20 Romans 3:9-20**

*“All people are under the power of sin”*

Overriding all differences of class, creed, and culture is the somber fact that all are “under sin.” This statement is presented as a “charge,” that is, a legal accusation made in the name of God against his own created beings. The awful togetherness of the human race that takes precedence over every other similarity or dissimilarity is that before God we are all exposed in our addiction to sin.

There is a major difference between “sin” and “sins,” so we must be careful not to confuse “doing things that are not right” (sins) with the fact that we are dominated by a fundamentally evil force called sin. The difference is not unlike that which exists between the symptoms of a disease and the disease itself. Any solution to the human problem that fails to deal with the root cause of sin is no more a solution than cold compresses on a fevered forehead are a cure for the infection causing the fever. Only through faith in Christ and the forgiveness for sin that he offers can we be freed from the power of sin.

*Only you, Lord, can free me from my addiction to sin. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 21 Luke 18:9-14**

*“O Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner”*

The values God honors are those whereby we look at ourselves in light of who he is (as did the tax-collector), not through the distortion that comes from comparing ourselves to others (as did the Pharisee). Unfortunately, the prideful attitude of the Pharisee is all too often the rule – that of judging people by sight or simply based on their station in society. Consequently, rather than approach God on the basis of his mercy and grace, we approach him by appealing to our seemingly superior track record and subtly suggesting he owes us a response.

Humility takes a sober look at where we stand before God, seeing ourselves not as a product of our own achievements but forgiven as a result of God’s kindness in extending mercy through Christ. This way of approaching God alters radically the dynamic of how we see him and ourselves. We do not rate ourselves more highly than we ought, nor do we suggest that God is blessed to have us on his side. The privilege is ours to know him. The attitude of humility rests on his grace; pride is an affront to God.

*I thank you, Lord, that I am a sinner who has received your mercy. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 19 - 24

“The Lost Older Son”

**Thursday, September 22 Matthew 23:1-7**

*“Don’t follow their example”*

In a matter-of-fact statement Jesus says that the Pharisees and teachers of religious law occupy Moses’ seat - they are the legal experts and exponents of the Law - and Jesus affirms respect for their role in representing the Law, but says the people are to avoid following the practices of the leaders who fail to bring together word and deed. While commending their representation of Moses, Jesus criticizes their leadership with several observations.

First, they put religious burdens on others which they themselves neither practice nor lift a finger to help them obey. Second, they practice their religious traditions for the recognition they receive from people. Third, they love the chief places in the assembly and want to be greeted with honor in society. Jesus will contrast their practices with the new community he is creating. The followers of Jesus Christ have one teacher, the Christ; there is one level, where all are brothers and sisters in Christ; and there is one measure of greatness, that of being servants who humble themselves in loving service to others.

*I will follow your example, Lord, of humility and love for others. Amen.*

**Friday, September 23 Proverbs 5:21-23**

*“He will be lost because of his great foolishness”*

Piling up terms for sin, verse 22 envisions evil as a trap, cords that will trip up those who do wrong and hold them there until a hunter comes to end their lives. But the loss of life is not so much due to the choice of evil as a rejection of self-discipline. Whatever choices he has made while lacking self-control, they are the result of refusing instruction and fear of God. Commenting on these verses, R. Murphy writes: “The wicked are always running with death at their heels. That death is most likely the reverse of Shalom, life that is short, deprived, and alienated. Death involves corruption, a cutting off from all that has value, including God.”

The word “lost” in verse 23 (as used in the New Living Translation) is rendered by the New Jewish Version as “infatuated,” so that the verse reads: “He will die for lack of discipline, infatuated by his great folly,” stressing that sin has the power to fascinate and deceive. If one can become “lost in sin,” one can also be “led astray” by poor judgment, dulled in a kind of drunkenness, “lost” in the sense of reaping a disastrous result.

*Seek us, Lord, when in our foolishness we have become lost. Amen.*

**Saturday, September 24 Luke 19:1-10**

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”*

This passage summarizes many key themes Luke has highlighted through his Gospel – most notably Jesus’ mission to seek and save the lost, a mission that now belongs to the church as his body. One of the errors the pious make is to separate themselves from the world in such a way that they lose contact with sinners. Usually two factors feed such isolation: (1) a healthy desire not to succumb to standards of living that destroy moral integrity, and (2) a subtle but deadly feeling of superiority, so that we feel we are inherently better than others.

This second element is not of the Lord, as he makes clear to his disciples when they argue over who will be the greatest in God’s Kingdom. It can squeeze out our ability to empathize with the sinner’s plight. It forgets that our blessing is the result of God’s gracious work, not our inherent character. The first element is a good one. However, it risks being applied so thoroughly that one ceases to associate with unbelievers for fear of what comes with the relationship, making it difficult to build the relationships on which much evangelism depends.

*Give me wisdom, Lord, to be in the world but not of it. Amen.*