

2001 Advent Week 1 - Prodigal's Sister

by John Piper

The story of the prodigal's sister shows the power of love and family bonds, and how they can overcome even the greatest challenges.

Duration: 14:28

Scripture: Luke 15:11

Topics: "Prodigal Son", "Ministry Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15:11-32. The sermon focuses on the reason why Jesus ate with sinners, as explained in this parable. The preacher describes the story of a young girl named Hyonita, who longs for her brother to return home. The sermon also mentions the road that leads away from the Father's farm, symbolizing the path of sin and rebellion. The preacher emphasizes the importance of doing ministry with joy and not sadness.

Transcript

Imagine with me that in the parable of the prodigal son, there is not only a younger son and an older son, but a younger daughter as well. The name of the younger son is Nikva, the name of the older son is Mainan, and the name of the daughter is Hayanita. As we enter the story, Hayanita is 18 years old, and Nikva, the younger, has been gone for 10 years.

She and her father are sitting on the front porch in their nightly vigil. This is now the 20th year that I have attempted to write these poems, and I want you to know that without you they could not and would not exist. They are written out of worship, for worship, and are born out of the heart of a very happy shepherd, elder, preacher, teacher.

And therefore they are a testimony to you of my deep gladness at being among you. And I offer them to you as a gift, which is really my own joy, I hope, pouring back on you and your fulfillment of that wonderful text. Let them not do this with sadness, for that would be of no advantage to you, but let them do this ministry with joy.

This is the first of what will be perhaps three and maybe four on this parable, and do remember this. The parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15, 11 to 32, is written to give an account for why the Lord Jesus came and ate with sinners. The road down from the father's farm was empty, like an empty arm that once embraced and then let go, or one that beckoned from below.

The road runs west and curves its way through miles and miles of wheat, and may at harvest time look like a path through paradise, or walls of wrath, like water heaped on either side of Israel, for one a tide to save and for another slay. At first the slope that leads away and westward falls is kind and soft, then cursed with falling stones and oft with wind and rutted steeps, and so it proves an easy way to go and hard to come. The front porch of the mansion, with a roof above for shade and rocking chairs below, was planned and built ten years ago and faces west.

And recently a ramp was added there to free the old man from the steps. His knees had gotten bad. The cedar trees spread round the house, cast shadows now, as Hyanita kept her vow and sat before her father on the steps and prayed that dusk or dawn would bring her brother home.

The old man watched her from his chair, controlled and measured in the mingling of his pain and pleasure, with a love perhaps that only fathers know. Her brother Manon long ago gave up these feudal seasons, as he thought, and worked instead. He has more fruitful things to do than gaze with dreamers as the final rays of light and hope, he said, fade from the western sky.

His heart was numb and cold, and so his father cried and felt that both his sons had died. The one from play when passions boil, the other from his toxic toil. The one a hundred miles away, the other even while he stay.

The one a slave to lust and fools, the other slave to laws and rules. The Hyanita freely came and nightly watched her brother's name fall from her father's silent lips in prayer and saw the way it rips his heart and learned from him the way to love. This night her mind would stray back to the time ten years ago and more when she was eight or so, and oh so happy when they played with her.

Both brothers and the stayed old man now sitting in his chair, eyes closed and whispering his prayer, would lie down in the autumn sheaves and she would cover them with leaves and cedar straw and then she would leap and clap as if to wake from sleep and there would be a great earthquake and three grown men would rise and shake and shout aloud with arms outspread, our little girl can raise the dead. And so tonight she pondered this. At eighteen she still felt the kiss of Nikba on her cheek ten years ago for one last time and saw the tears roll down his face when she said, Nik, don't go.

She hugged his waist, then quick, as if to do it while he could, he turned and ran down through the wood so he could stop and cry, then fled along the empty road that led down to the west, away from all his family and home. A call that no one understood, and he perhaps the least, now seemed to be all overpowering. His place was bare, nor has she seen his face.

Ten years have turned a little lass into a woman now, but past as time may do, some things do not. And Hyanida's heart for what one day she planned to do was just as sure as on the night she thrust her little hand into the dark and said, I'll find you, Nikba. Mark my words, someday I'll find you dead and bring you home alive.

His head was lifted now, and eyes were wide to look once more and see who plied the road from west to east. At last she said, My father, firm and fast like great spikes in a tree, your love for Nikba strengthens me above my every other love save yours. And year by year this love endures, and now I am 18, and ask your blessing on the only task that I have dreamed and planned for all these years that Nik, since I was small, has been away.

I want to go and find him where he is and show him he can still come home. He closed his weakening eyes as if he dozed, then said, Just like your mother spoke, you speak. She would be pleased to stoke your fire and send you on your way with iron shield and sword to slay whatever dragons lay twixt you and exploits that you aim to do.

He smiled. But Haya, she is gone, you know. All dragons slain but one, the fever.

She fought well and lost. And now, my daughter, is the cost of having Nikba losing you? It is not safe for girls to do such things or go where Nikba lives. I've been there many times.

It gives my heart a shudder just to think of how they lust and what they drink and what they say to girls and do. Nikba is not the boy that you remember, Hayanita. He's changed.

Father, I know all these unpleasant things. And I know he has changed, but so have we. Ten years of prayer was not in vain.

And I believe some things remain from all you've taught. A tender tug and that he still can feel the hug I gave him when he pulled away, just like I feel his kiss today. And Father, most of all, you taught me there is a power in love that naught can thwart and that it moves where truth and courage speak.

And neither youth nor age can hinder its success, but only fear and quietness. Our mother died when I was six. And I still see today the sticks she broke and said, See that? Just so God breaks the back of every foe to bring his children home.

I think that she would let me go. A blink, my daughter. In a blink, she would have let you go.

And you? I could not well succeed without your hand of blessing on my head. He scanned the darkening west and empty road and fields and wondered what they bode now for this little girl. Then raised his trembling, empty arm and praised the grace and courage in her heart and did then in these words impart a blessing with his right hand laid now gently on her head.

Invade, my valiant daughter, darkness now. And I will keep our common vow here in this place until you come again. And may you bring me some good news beyond the gift of men that both my boys may live again.

As we light candle one today, let none relent but ever pray. And when the months stretch into years and decades gather up the tears, know this, a little girl, or it may be a boy, is rising secretly and will become in ways that you have never dreamed nor ever knew a light within your darkening sky, an answer to your endless cry.

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