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At Your Door Step: More Prodigal Than You Know

February 22

By Matt Hook

Luke 15:25 – 32

- There's a new term called "The Majority World Church," meaning that the majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, rather than the West? And do you know the percentage of Christians in the majority world church = **70%**?
- **The 3rd largest mission field is America,** (following China and India.) Only 17% of Americans attend church on any given Sunday. 9/11 was only a blip on the screen.
- American suburbia by itself would be the 7th largest country in the world! If we want to see God's kingdom come, settle in suburbia or small town America, we must simultaneously see ourselves as missionaries. Thus we are *connected* with brothers and sisters in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Those countries are sending missionaries *here* especially to gateway cities like Miami, New York, and LA.

Why don't we see *ourselves* as missionaries? I think the main reasons are: Sadly, some of us who grew up in church were put off too easily by the image of an older lady in a bun or polyester. Some of us don't think the message of Christ is unique enough to share. Some of us like to be comfortable, and some of us would rather *judge* other people than reach out to them. But this morning God has a message for you and me. I believe He *wants* us to see that we can make a difference in this huge mission field we live in. If you're here feeling like you missed it somewhere, God says that doesn't matter. Remember, with God it's never too late. God may very well have called you to right here, right now. God's purposes can happen right here, even with what you're facing today.

We began our missions & evangelism month with Jesus' awesome story of a forgiving father and a prodigal son. But really there were *two* sons. We know about the famous one who went out and spent his inheritance in loose living. We hear about *those* kids all the time. They leave. They're the infamous ones, even around Dexter. But there's another son in the story. What *about* the overlooked one? The boring one? **What about the son that didn't go away? Could that be you?** Growing up, maybe *you* too learned to be one of those people who don't make waves or cause problems. You may think of *yourself* as low maintenance or boring. No major hang ups. And thus no major attention. No major parties or homecomings necessary. *But*, according to Jesus, maybe just as lost as the *younger* Prodigal Son.

For a long time I thought "prodigal" meant "lost," but that's not right. **Prodigal means "recklessly or extravagantly wasteful."** The Prodigal Son was recklessly wasteful in spending his inheritance and blowing off his father's love. We saw in the pigsty how the Prodigal remembered the way his father treated the lowest of his servants, headed for home, and how while he was still a long way off, the father runs to meet him and throws a huge party for him. What a great ending! But Jesus doesn't leave it there... So we pick up Jesus' story in Luke 15:25. *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' 28 'The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' 31 'My*

son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

The party was *not* entertainment (as the older son saw it). It was not because of *who* the younger son was. It was the father's expression of joy. Why? Because, Jesus was saying, that's how God acts! The Father *parties*, **the older brother spews**, and becomes "recklessly wasteful" himself in how he treated his father and brother: He becomes angry and refuses to go in. (If we're honest, a lot of us would rather spew than party).

He argues with his father, and his argument betrays him. The cap comes off, and we see his true attitude. He sees *himself* as a slave, not a son. (How often have you been vacuuming or cooking, and said to yourself "Nobody appreciates me. I'm more like a slave than anything.") He's reckless, going off on his father. Here's the crazy thing: He doesn't realize *he will actually own everything*. But he wants nothing to do with the people in the house. He calls the prodigal "*this son of yours*," not "*my brother*." He even accuses his brother of sleeping with prostitutes. (There was no previous mention of that.) He's spewing and judging and resentful: like many of us, like the church: the ultimate non-squeaky wheel. And we see ourselves and how needy even us "non-needy" ones really are:

Though he's home, he is just as sinful and just as alienated from his father as the younger brother had been. (He's just been less dramatic about it!) But now he's upset. His feelings are hurt. (Amazing how much drama we create when we get our feelings hurt. What we really think comes out in droves!) And if that's you, resentful and under-appreciated, know this: Jesus understands you. Not only that, but look what's happening:

The father's response is exactly the same as for his brother. *The father leaves the party to talk to him,* with the same love and compassion he had for his younger son. "I didn't throw you a party because you have had something better – a peaceful, lifelong satisfaction of being here, as a faithful son ought." And here's the amazing part: He adds "*All I have is yours.*" All I have is yours. Who does this father *represent*? God. God! Our heavenly Father. I believe there are many of us here this morning who are here to hear God say to you: "***All I have is yours***", the most beautiful and overlooked statement in the parable. God says "Life is difficult, but I will never, never hold back from you." *It offers us a clue as to who the real prodigal is.*

Prodigal means - adj. "Exceedingly or recklessly wasteful. Lavish. Extravagant." n. "One who gives or spends lavishly or foolishly." **Do you know what the opposite of "prodigal" is? Miserly. Close-fisted. Stingy. Hoarding.** Do you see who the most prodigal one is? Do you see **who is more prodigal than we know? The Father, God.** *The father* is as much a prodigal as either son is. Maybe more.

We have an incredible story of recklessly wasteful mercy and love. Prodigal love. Our heavenly Father is prodigal. What a challenge to us – we serve a prodigal God! He is lavish, and excessive. Why do we have to reach out to those on our doorstep in this way? Because the Father does. Because we worship a God who is lavish. Because **the Bible as a whole is a missionary book about a missionary God, seeking to call and create a missionary people.** (that's us!) His love overflows like a fountain!

We must also resist the natural trend that occurs. When the younger son was welcomed back in, he remembered how *needy* he was. But...every *younger* son moves quickly to being an *older* son. It may be only matter of months before our attitudes shift, and we become the older son.

Jesus is calling his followers to be like the prodigal, recklessly wasteful father, like our heavenly Father who gave us his Son, our Savior, who died on the cross, who loves us with a love that will not let us go. That prodigal love also raised Jesus from the dead!

The question for us today: What are we prodigals with?

- A lot of people are prodigals for themselves, lavish & wasteful.
- Some are prodigals for their families.
- Even fewer are prodigals for friends.
- But how many of us will be prodigals for God? For the least and the lost, the poor?

If you are like me, you can remember when people were recklessly wasteful in showing their love for you, and it changed your life. (Grandma? My mom, my sister). Maybe it gave you hope. Maybe it gave you a job. Maybe it gave you a glimpse into how much God loved you. What a waste of time and energy! Except that they honored me with their love. You can think of people who have done that for you. Just do like them!

This week, be prodigal – for Christ. Because we know what we know, we can be generous and lavish with our love. Even on our own doorstep. Why? Because they don't know the love is endless. It knows no boundaries. Even the boring, "nice", predictable, low-maintenance, non-rebel types. They need their relationship with the Father just as much as the far from home ones.

How many expressions of prodigal love through prodigal people would it have taken to prevent a suicide? An abortion? A shooting? A young person's decision to sell him or herself? How much pain and loneliness could be eliminated if someone took the time to lavish a person with Jesus' prodigal love? How many encounters until that person would realize the truth, see their needs met, and find their hope in him?

What if our churches were less stingy and less miserly with God's love, forgiveness, and blessing? We could change the world. Imagine a place where people feel it personally and then go and share it the same way? We must show people the recklessly wasteful love of God and his forgiveness and His justice, caring for their needs. We get the main thing the main thing: God is crazy about all people! He has lavishly, wastefully sent his Son Jesus Christ; that we might have life, and life to share: abundantly – lavishly, recklessly, wastefully loving and following him. So let's go!

One final thing. Does the older brother go into the party? We don't know. Jesus doesn't tell us. But how cool the story would be if he *did*. Today, if this older brother is you, you'll never know the whole truth until you come to the Father and join the party. Won't you begin celebrating?