

Empire Church of the Brethren
Sunday Service Sermons

20 October 2024

Living in the Far Country at Our Address

Text: "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living." *Luke 15:13*

Wild living. Have you ever done any wild living?

Probably not.

I have only been to one party, party in my life.

My High School girlfriend made me go.

I survived but never wanted to go to another party with people I did not know that well.

How about you, are you a party animal, whatever that might mean.

We do like being with other people.

Humans are designed to live in groups.

Tribes, or whatever we might call our social groups.

We are social animals.

We get our identity and affirmation from others.

We also get criticism from others when we do not do what they think we should be doing.

Jesus experienced this from the religious leaders.

He claimed to be a man of God but did not avoid the "bad" people.

He even went to their homes and ate with them.

How could he?

When he knew of their criticism of him associating with nonreligious people, he spoke a stern rebuke to them.

His response are these three parables we have been looking at.

Lost sheep, lost coin and today a lost son.

We have a seeking shepherd, a seeking woman and a waiting and compassionate father.

In this story of the wayward son the elder son portrayed the attitude of religious people of that day toward the return of sinners to God.

Our tendency is to be like the elder son.

Critical and not accepting of those who come to their senses and return to Father God.

It is easy to exclude ourselves from this story.

Most Christians who read this story do so with some degree of pious self-satisfaction.

It is easy to focus on the son who takes his and leaves when the real focus is on the Father.

This is a parable about the broken hearted father who yearns for the return of a foolish and self-destructive son.

It is hard for us to identify with this parable for several reasons.

We have never demanded our inheritance before the death of our father as this son did.

We have never applied for a passport into a foreign country so that we could get away from the restraints of home.

We are not engaged in illicit living.

We have never been so down that we ate with the animals we were tending.

We have most likely never experienced starvation.

Not having a brother like this bad son we do not even identify with the elder brother.

We can easily come to the conclusion that this parable has no application or message for us personally.

If this happens we miss the point of the story.

Are we like the elder brother?

Do we find it easy to be satisfied with ourselves as we are because of self-righteousness?

Most of us have never committed a major sin.

We live mostly clean lives.

We have no bad addictions.

Is it easy for us to be judgmental toward those who have brought injury and poverty upon themselves because of self-inflicted wounds.

I fight this every Tuesday.

It is easy to be hasty and harsh in arriving at judgments concerning others.

Have we ever enjoyed a feast with God because of the return of a prodigal?

When the son returned the father sent word to all that they should come and enjoy the feast.

Some of us live so far away from where salvation experiences are taking place that we don't even know that a feast with God is a present possibility for those who are helping him rescue people from the far country.

Where is the far country?

It just might be anywhere that a person tries to live without God.

It is just one step away from the will of Father God.

It is so close that all of us are familiar with it, yet some of us do not recognize that we are living either in the far country or right on its border.

The far country begins when we demand our freedom to do what is contrary to the Father's good will.

The far country begins when we see life as an opportunity to be selfishly happy.

The far country begins for a person when they show absolutely no concern to improve the quality of their spiritual vitality or effectiveness in communicating the great love of God to those who are in sin.

Are we like the prodigal who returned?

We are most likely like him in some ways.

Have we departed from where we once were in the Father's house?

Have we wasted our time, talents, and treasure on ourselves?

Have we found our hearts hungry and thirsty for the food and fellowship of God's home and family?

The desire for selfish freedom leads to the far country.

Neglecting to nourish our souls on the food of God can lead us to the far country.

Greed for things can cause us to drift into the far country,

Unresolved resentment can lead us to the far country.

Some of us allow trouble to cause us to drift away from God.

Life can become a fruitless rat race that brings no satisfaction to our hearts.

We can be in the far country and not know it.

The prodigal acted as an irresponsible and self-destructive person for a period in his life.

However, just because people act irresponsibly on one occasion doesn't mean they have to remain that way always.

The prodigal came to great want.

He came to his senses and evaluated himself.

When he decided to return to his father, he came at once as he was.

He discovered that he was met a great way off.

He found that provisions had already been made for his return.

He experienced great rejoicing.

If you or anyone you know are living in the far country at their home address, it is time to come home to the Father God who has already prepared a welcome for you or anyone who will return to him.

Father God cares for the lost.

Sheep, coin, or person.

Jesus was telling of the great concern and love his father has for his children.

He does not stand off and judge.

He searches and looks for the return of the lost then rejoices with them when they return.

And welcomes them back with full status as if they had never left.
This is the love of God the greatest Father of all.