

INTRODUCTION 引言

Youth Sunday is a time to spotlight on our youth ministry. Our youth leaders deserve a lot of credit for their faithful ministries all these years. Today is also an opportunity to send away two college freshmen. We wish them well in their future journey. We will use the parable of the prodigal son to encourage them and all of us. Many of you know the story well. Therefore, instead of reading the whole passage I will summarize the story and highlight particular verses where necessary. At that time, some religious leaders were upset because Jesus welcomed sinners to come to him. Jesus explained His intent using a series of three parables – a shepherd lost one of his one hundred sheep, a woman lost one of her ten coins and a father lost one of his two sons. All three persons eventually found what they had lost. Then they invited others to celebrate with them. Jesus repeated the moral at the end of each parable. Let me quote verse 7 as an example: “...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...” The three owners cared about what was lost. Their joy was not complete until the lost was found. Likewise, although God is pleased with millions of Christians, He rejoices every time one more person is saved. Therefore, do not be satisfied because you and your family members are believers. Go find a lost soul and bring that person into God’s family. God welcomes the lost to come home.

EXPLANATION 解釋

Our focus today will be on the third parable. There are three main characters: the father and his two sons. One day, the younger boy asked his dad for his share of inheritance. It is an utter disrespectful thing to do in any culture. No family will divide a father’s properties until after his death. The father could have refused the request. But he did what his son asked for anyway. Money means freedom to the young man. He went as far as he could to look for pleasure. Too much, too easy and too soon is seldom a successful formula for life. After he squandered all his money, his so-called friends left him. He knew nobody in a foreign land. The only job he could find was to feed pigs. It was a despicable thing no Jew would do because pigs are unclean animals according to the Jewish Law. This young man was so hungry that he even wanted to eat the pigs’ food. His life was even worse than those animals. Then he suddenly remembered a merciful master: his own father! He treated his workers well and he gave them food. Why suffer under the hands of this ruthless pig owner? Therefore, he gathered all he had left and headed home. He even put together a script in his mind. Look at verses 18 and 19: 18 ... “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.” The Jews dare not utter God’s name because it is so sacred. Therefore they frequently address God as “heaven.” The prodigal reasoned that he no longer deserved to be a son. He would rather work as an employee. That would ensure food and a shelter. Meanwhile, the father was strolling outside his farm. Suddenly, he saw a person in shabby clothes approaching. It was his son! The old man dashed forward. In those days, it was not an honorable thing for a senior person to run. But the father could hardly contain his joy. He gave a warm hug and kiss to this dusty and smelly son. The young man might had expected anger and rejection from his father. But it was the complete opposite! Now the time came for the son to say his script. Read verse 21: And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against

heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ A true confession must be sincere. There is no excuse like “I was being careless” or “I didn’t mean to hurt you.” Humbly admit the offense you caused to the person. Before the son could express his willingness to become a worker, the father interrupted him. He asked his servants to quickly cover his son with the best robe, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. At that time, a ring also served as a stamp and servants usually walked bare-feet. His status as a son was restored. The father also ordered the servants to prepare a feast with a fattened calf. People in those days seldom ate meat unless in special occasions. The son had anticipated a lecture but his dad called for a party to celebrate. The father explained in verse 24: **‘For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’** ... The more important thing was to get his son back. He lost a substantial amount of wealth. But he finally found the respect from his son. The young man thought he found the freedom and happiness he dreamed about. But at the end he lost the provision and protection from home and even his dignity. He understood that home is not a place of rules and restrictions. But it is a safe haven filled with comfort, acceptance and love. The story can have ended with the reunion. But there is another key lesson we can learn from the older son. He was mad and did not want to go home because he thought his brother did not deserve a welcome. Once again, the father broke the norm. He went out to persuade his older son. He repeated the same reason: his brother was dead but now alive; he was lost but now is found.

CONCLUSION 結論

It is quite evident that the father in the parable represents our Heavenly Father. He never stops waiting for prodigal children to come back. God sees His relationship with us more important than anything else. Young people: your parents look at you the same way. They may look old and slow. They may not be as smart or strong as you. They ask you for help with their computers and phones. They will miss you after you go to college when they need technical support or someone to mow the lawn. But they cherish their relationship with you the most. You see, home is more than food, your bed and a game room. Your parents are more than your cook, chauffeur, alarm clock and ATM machine. Home is a place with warmth. It is where men can wear holey shirts or no shirt. Messy hair and stinky feet are tolerated. Shower is optional, for no longer than three days. You are accepted even at your worst and second chances are always available. No matter what will happen, there is always a home you can go back to. Your family always loves you, though your sibling may not show that all the time. Your title as a child is not earned and can never be lost. With privilege also comes responsibilities. College is a place to transition to an adult’s life. From now on, no one will put food on your table, or wash your dishes and laundry. You will also pay your own bills, although your parents will put money in your bank account. People will call you “mister.” Decisions you make will affect you more than your family. Doing dumb things is part of growing up. Everyone went through the same path. But there are major differences between an accident, a mistake and a sin. An accident is something you cannot prevent or predict. A mistake is an unintentional error you commit as you work toward a goal. However, a sin is something you do on purpose, knowing that it is contrary to God’s will. Your parents have been trying to protect you from any accident and mistake. A clear sign of maturity is to avoid sinning against God. Your parents will no longer be around you. But your Heavenly Father is always with you. He is full of patience, compassion and grace. Even when you go astray for a season, there is always joy and celebration as you turn back to Him. You may lose opportunities but do not lose hope. God always welcomes the lost to come home.

INTRODUCTION 引言

青年主日是讓我們把焦點放在青少年事工的時候。在此感謝我們的青少年同工們長久以來的忠心事奉。今天也是歡送兩位大學新生的機會。我們祝願他們在未來的人生旅程中一切順利。我們將用浪子的比喻來鼓勵他們和我們所有人。你們許多人都非常熟悉這個故事。因此，我不會閱讀整段經文，而是總結故事並在有需要時引用某些章節。當時，一些宗教領袖因為耶穌歡迎罪人來找祂而不高興。耶穌用一系列三個比喻來解釋祂的心意：一個牧羊人失去了他的一百隻羊中的一隻，一位女士失去了十個硬幣中的一個，一位父親失去了他兩個兒子中的一個。這三個人最終都找到了他們失去的東西，然後他們邀請別人與他們一起慶祝。耶穌在每個比喻的結尾重複了教訓。讓我引用第 7 節作為例子：「... 一個罪人悔改，在天上也要這樣為他歡喜 ...。」三位物主都關心失去的東西。如果沒有把東西找回來，他們的喜樂無法得到滿足。同樣，雖然神喜悅千千萬萬的基督徒，但每當有一個人得救，祂的心就歡喜。因此，不要因為你和你的家人是信徒而滿足。去尋找一個迷失的靈魂，把他帶回神的家。神總是歡迎失喪的人回家。

EXPLANATION 解釋

我們今天的重點是在第三個比喻。其中有三個主要的角色：父親和他的兩個兒子。有一天，小兒子向他父親要求他的那份家產。在任何文化中，這都是極不尊重的事情。沒有家庭會在父親去世之前分配他的財產的。父親本可以拒絕這個請求，但他還是按照兒子的要求去做。金錢對這個年輕人來說等於自由。他遠走高飛，盡情享樂。太多錢、太容易得到和太早得到很少是成功的方程式。在他花光了一切之後，他的酒肉朋友都撇棄他。他在異國他鄉誰都不認識。他唯一能找到的工作就是餵豬。這是猶太人蔑視的事情，因為根據猶太法律，豬是不潔淨的動物。這個年輕人餓到連豬糧都想吃。他的遭遇連牲畜都不如。然後他突然想起了一位慈悲的家主：他自己的父親！他善待工人，給他們食物。為什麼要在這個無情的豬老板手下受苦？於是，他收拾僅有的一切，準備回家。他在腦子裡編好了台詞。請看第 18 和 19 節：18 ... 『父親！我得罪了天，又得罪了你；19 從今以後，我不配稱為你的兒子，把我當作一個雇工吧！』猶太人不敢直接稱呼神的名字，因為它是如此的神聖。因此，他們經常稱神為「天」。浪子認為他不再配做兒子，他寧願做個雇工，這樣起碼確保食物和住宿。在這個時候，父親正在農場外散步。突然，他看到一個衣衫襤褸的人靠近。是他的兒子！老人家馬上向前跑過去。在那個時代，一個上了年紀的人跑是不體面子的。但父親難以控制他的喜悅。他給這個風塵僕僕且全身酸臭的兒子一個熱情的擁抱和親吻。這個年輕人本來預料父親會生氣並拒絕他，但情況完全相反！現在到了兒子背台詞的時候了。請看第 21 節：兒子說：『父親！我得罪了天，又得罪了你；從今以後，我不配稱為你的兒子。』真正的懺悔必須是真誠的。你不能說「我是不小心的」或

「我不是故意傷害你的」這些藉口。你必須謙卑地承認你冒犯了別人。兒子還來不及表示願意當工人，父親就打斷了他。他吩咐僕人趕緊給兒子披上最好的袍子，給他戴上戒指，並給他穿鞋子。那時候，戒指也可以作為印章，而僕人通常是光腳的。這一切表明他已經恢復了兒子的地位。父親還吩咐僕人宰肥牛來慶祝。當時的人很少吃肉，除非在特殊場合。兒子本來以為會被痛罵一頓，但他的父親卻要求開派對。父親在第 24 節解釋說：『因為我這個兒子是死而復活，失而又得的。』...。更重要的是他的兒子回家。他損失了大量的財富，但他終於得到了兒子的尊重。年輕人以為他找到了他夢寐以求的自由和幸福。但最終他失去了家庭的供應和保護，甚至喪掉了尊嚴。他明白家不是一個充滿規則和約束的地方，乃是一個充滿舒適、接納和愛的避風港。故事本可以在這裡大團圓結局，但我們可以從大兒子身上學到另一個重要的教訓。他很生氣，不想回家，因為他認為弟弟不應該受到歡迎。父親又一次打破常規，他出去說服他的大兒子。他重複了同樣的理由：他的兄弟是死而復活，失而又得的。

CONCLUSION 結論

很明顯，比喻中的父親代表我們的天父。祂一直等待浪子回頭。神看祂與我們的關係比什麼都重要。年輕人：你爸媽也這麼看你。你也許覺得他們又老又慢。他們可能不如你聰明或強壯。他們常常找你幫忙處理電腦和手機的毛病。你上了大學之後他們會想念，特別當他們需要技術支援或有人修剪草之時。但他們最珍惜與你的關係。你要明白，家不僅僅是提供食物、床和遊戲間的地方。你的父母不僅僅是你的廚師、司機、鬧鐘和自動提款機。家是一個溫暖的地方。男士們在家裡可以穿有破洞的上衣甚至不穿上衣。凌亂的頭髮和臭腳是可以容忍的。洗澡是有可以免掉的，但最好不超過三天。就算在你最糟糕的情況下，你也會被接納，並且總是有第二次機會。不管你發生什麼事，總有一個可以回去的家。你的家人永遠愛你，儘管你的兄弟姐妹可能不一定表現出來。你作為孩子的身份不是賺來的，也永遠不會失去。但是特權也伴隨著責任。大學是一個過渡到成年人生活的地方。從現在開始，沒有人會放食物在你的桌子上，或者洗你的盤子和衣服。你還要自己付賬單，儘管你的父母會把錢存入你的銀行帳戶。人們會稱你為「先生」。你做出的決定會影響你過於影響你的家人。做笨事是成長的一部分，每個人都經歷過同樣的路。但是意外、錯誤和罪之間有很大的區別。意外是你無法預防或預料的事情。錯誤是你在朝著目標努力時的無心之失。然而，罪是明知故犯的事情，雖然你知道違背了神的旨意。你的父母一直在努力保護你免受任何意外和錯誤的影響。成熟的一個明顯標誌是避免得罪神。你的父母將不再在你身邊，但你的天父總是與你同在。祂充滿耐心、憐憫和恩典。縱使你偶爾誤入歧途，當你轉向神之時，總是會有喜樂和慶祝。你可能會失去機會，但不要失去盼望。神總是歡迎失喪的人回家。