“The Prodigal Son”

We are going to move from hard thinking to a story that Jesus told which speaks directly to the imagination that and to the heart, the prodigal son story. I bet if you ask this about anybody on the street if they knew the prodigal son story. They would be able come up with a basic plot about the kid who runs away and the father who welcomes back and the party he throws for him and how that’s a picture of God. But if you ask those same people how, do you remember exactly in what situation Jesus told that story? They probably wouldn’t remember and maybe you don’t either. And yet Luke, and I didn’t either until I started studying this stuff and I realize, oh my goodness, the setting is really important. Then on the one hand the story, which is probably one of the most famous short story ever in the history of the world, really stands on its feet. You don’t need the context you can understand what it’s all about We are going to move from hard thinking to a story that Jesus told which speaks directly to the imagination that and to the heart, the prodigal son story. I bet if you ask this about anybody on the street if they knew the prodigal son story. They would be able come up with a basic plot about the kid who runs away and the father who welcomes back and the party he throws for him and how that’s a picture of God. But if you ask those same people how, do you remember exactly in what situation Jesus told that story? They probably wouldn’t remember and maybe you don’t either. And yet Luke, and I didn’t either until I started studying this stuff and i realize, oh my goodness, the setting is really important. Then on the one hand the story, which is probably one of the most famous short story ever in the history of the world, really stands on its feet. You don’t need the context you can understand what it’s all about without any framework. But Luke is very careful to give us a framework and this gives us all the more power. So what I want to do with you tonight is simply go through that and fill it in with a little bit of things I’ve learned about the culture of the time and the background of so on and bring it in even further alive for us and let that be food for your prayer a little bit r tonight, a little bit as you wake up tomorrow morning. So the setting that Luke gives is used to tell us is this. It is in chapter 15 of Luke’s gospel. Youi will want to look that up later on. The tax collects and sinners were all drawing near to listen to this. Now remember, what was about those tax collector and sinners, what made them unclean in the minds of the elite law makers, the scribes and the Pharisees, tax collects, well nobody likes to pay tax anyway, but in this case tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman governments to collect taxes from their fellow Jews paid to hated oppressors the Romans, you know. They were like the Uncle Tom, of their day, uh. And by sinners, sinners didn’t simply mean people who misbehaved, sinner is kind of a technical term or anybody who was really care less about keeping the laws of the Torah, the food laws, the Sabbath laws, and so on. So if you didn’t do that, you were unclean, you were a sinner and you shouldn’t eat with such people cause you made yourself unclean if you did it. And Jesus made it a habit of eating around with such people. To make a point, not just cause he like to hang out with people, he did seem to like hanging out with people, but it was an active parable for him to deliberately eat with tax collectors and sinners and he tells why in what he proceeds to say. Uh, I stopped in the mid-sentence. The tax collector and sinners were drawing near to listen him but the Pharisee and scribes started to complain saying this man welcomes sinners and each with them. That’s pathethis 4:20. Maybe picturing a meal with Jesus in such an active table fellowship with those people or they may simply be commenting on how he does this habitually. But anyway that the setting. And the first thing Jesus does is telling them short parable about of the lost sheep. What men among you have a hundred sheep but losing one of them would leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it. We aren’t so sure when we think about wait a minute, if I had a hundred sheep and one of them went astray, would I put the ninety-nine at risk to go after the lost one. That doesn’t sound like a goode, uh prudent act. At the false problem we are told because ethey did have sheep herding in groups these big flocks belonged to an extended family and there were plenty of males avaible and it was a lonely thing to be out there with the sheep so they did it in groups. That part isn’t a problem . And the obvious answer that Jesus expects well anyibe one of us, of cousre would send someone after the lsot sheep, thas apart of our life, we do that . And he continues, and when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulder with great joy upon his arrival home and calls together his friends and neighbors and says, “Rejoice with me because I have lost my, I found my lost sheep.” That sounds to us like an overreaction. Really? Have a big party because somebody found a lost sheep? And a scholar, who’s stuff Ive read has really good on parables of Luke, he lived in Lebanon among some Arab Christian peasants,w ho lived a lifestyle and sest of customs that are centuries old and um he said, in that life a peasant village, yes. When you have parties, and I’m guessing, your wedding and funerals, but what else? Do youi hav any social events? Something like when somebody finds a lost sheep, yes you would have a party. So Jesus, he’s not making up a story, he’s talking about how things usually are in the lives of these people. An dwhy is he bother ing to sya this? Well he gives his explanantion , he says,” I tell you in just the same way, there will emor Joy in heaven over one sinner, who repents and over ninety-nine righteous people, who have no need to repentencance. What’s that got to do with his table ship between tax collectors and sinners. Hes saying, “Im acting out the hospitalatlity of the father , whoio is welcoming these people back and creating th eoccassion for them to straighten up their lives. So, he is both defending himself and giving an image of the fathers mercy. And then he continues, or what woman having ten coins and and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house until she finds it