

THE WORD OF GOD: Choosing Discipleship

Lesson 17. Expulsion from Paradise

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reading of the day: Luke 15:1-32

Prepare Ahead: The background section is material for the instructor and is not meant to be used word for word. The answers to the Bible Study discussion questions are provided for informational purposes and can be read aloud and shared verbally.

References:

www.vemkar.us

Orthodox Study Bible

Memory Verse:

**“...he was lost and is found,
was dead and now is alive.”**

Luke 15:32

Bible Study Lesson

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

For Students

Sheep, Coins, and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-32)

¹ Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” ³ So He spoke this parable to them, saying: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ ⁷ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ ¹⁰ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

¹¹ Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. ¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’

²⁰ “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. ²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was

dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’

²⁸ “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore, his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

³¹ “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

Questions:

1. *The Pharisees were scandalized and upset that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners, but Jesus didn't worry about the accusations they made. Instead, He continued going to those who needed him, regardless of the effect these rejected people might have on His reputation. How can or do you follow Jesus' example and do the same?*
2. *What message is the shepherd giving by leaving the ninety-nine sheep?*
3. *What symbolism do the ten coins represent and why would the woman be so excited to find the one lost coin?*
4. *How can you help create an atmosphere of celebration when someone turns to God in your community?*
5. *How can the principle of rejoicing over a repentant sinner impact our approach to those struggling with sin in our communities?*
6. *What is the younger son really saying when he asks for his inheritance from his father?*
7. *Why is it significant in the story that the younger son was willing to tend swine?*
8. *The son was brought to repentance. How is true repentance different than regret, remorse, or even punishment?*
9. *What do you think the fatted calf symbolizes which the father offers in celebration of his younger son's return?*
10. *At the end of the parable, the older brother comes out to hear what is going on and is upset with his father for throwing a party for his younger brother who squandered everything. The older is mad and jealous at the attention the younger is receiving. Have you ever been jealous of another? What does this parable teach you about that type of situation?*

For the Teacher

Background:

The Parable of the Prodigal Son teaches the lesson of God's Fatherly love and forgiveness for those who repent. The parable describes the passion of a caring father for his run-away son. Day after day, the father had been scanning the horizon for any sign of his lost son. Although in the first century a father would typically wait until a son showed some sign of respect before addressing him, here the father threw all social conventions aside. He could not wait to see his son. He started walking toward him. With open arms, he embraced his son, pulling him tightly to himself. God is like this loving father. He wants to welcome sinners back home with open arms.

This parable also brings to our needed attention many of the important themes found throughout the whole of St. Luke's Gospel. It shows us that because of the common inversion of human values, it is the last who shall enter first in the Kingdom of God. Because of pride, the oldest son who was dutiful and constant, finds himself full of resentment and outside the joyous celebration, while the prodigal son through humility and acceptance of his own faults and weaknesses, finds himself the guest of honor, very much like the fact that the pagan Gentile peoples of the world entered the church, while the Jewish nation, God's own chosen people, remained without. But above all, this is a parable about the limitless love that God has for us sinners. Like the father who patiently endured the very different but nonetheless equal mistakes of both his sons, God comes to us in the Gospel bearing the wonderful and hopeful message of reconciliation.

There is great consolation in this wondrous parable. When moments of discouragement come and spiritual failures tend to overwhelm us, there is no better medicine than the reading of the story of this forgiving father – a symbol of our heavenly father Himself. It tells us that no one escapes God's gracious love or ever gets too far away, for this is no ordinary love; it defies all human standards.

Questions:

- 1. The Pharisees were scandalized and upset that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners, but Jesus didn't worry about the accusations they made. Instead, He continued going to those who needed him, regardless of the effect these rejected people might have on His reputation. How can or do you follow Jesus' example and do the same?**

Answers may vary, but the students should look within and see if they are willing to sit with outcasts, especially in their schools and during lunchtime. They should not be concerned about their reputation or what others will think. In sitting and interacting with others, especially those that are not welcomed in their schools' social groups, the students will be able to bring the light of Christ into their lives and demonstrate Christ's example to others.

- 2. What message is the shepherd giving by leaving the ninety-nine sheep?**

That one sheep is precious and important to the shepherd and he is willing to leave the other ninety-nine just for that one. God is the same way. Sometimes we feel that we are just one in a large group of people. Perhaps we feel obscured and not noticed by God, but nothing is further from the truth, because God sees each and every one of us as precious, for even the hairs on our heads are numbered (Luke 12:7). He is willing to go searching for us, calling out our names and actively looking for us. When we hear our names being called and feel Christ pulling us to Him, we must turn to Him. When He finds us, He will pick us up, put us on His shoulders, and rejoice because we have been found and have been reunited with the flock.

- 3. What symbolism do the ten coins represent and why would the woman be so excited to find the one lost coin?**

The ten silver coins comprise a single necklace worn by a married woman who would receive them on her wedding day, similar to a woman receiving a wedding ring today. To lose one would be greatly distressing. The silver coin, a drachma, would carry the image of the king and the one lost coin symbolizes mankind, which carries the image of God on it. That one coin is mankind's fall from grace, while the remain nine represent the angelic realm and ranks. When the woman, representing the Mother Church, finds the coin (humanity) and reunites it with the other coins (the angels), everyone rejoices (v. 10).

- 4. How can you help create an atmosphere of celebration when someone turns to God in your community?**

When someone who has not been to the Church in a very long time or someone who has had a questionable past

comes to the Church for the first time, we should welcome them with open arms. Some are prone to say things like, “*Where have you been?*” “*Oh, fancy seeing you come around!*” or “*This place isn’t for you*”. When we say these things, especially when not thinking before we speak, we not only hurt the people trying to find God, but push them away and become like the Pharisees. Yet, we don’t have to even say these phrases, but if our attitude and thoughts express this feeling, people will feel it and not return to the Church.

St. John Chrysostom said it best, “*The Church is a hospital, and not a courtroom, for souls. She does not condemn on behalf of sins, but grants remission of sins.*” This is how we must understand the Church and those seeking Christ.

When people come searching for a relationship with Christ, we must also make an effort to introduce them to others in the community who are involved in the Church and the life of Christ. In doing this, we create an atmosphere of love and joy.

5. How can the principle of rejoicing over a repentant sinner impact our approach to those struggling with sin in our communities?

Truly, when we rejoice over someone who has turned away from sin and dedicated their life to Christ, we demonstrate to others struggling with sin, that it is alright to acknowledge their mistakes and turn to Christ. For many of us, we are embarrassed of our sins, and rightly so, thus, not wanting to admit our faults. There is no way to receive forgiveness for those sins if we do not accept them and take responsibility. Many others do not want to repent and turn from their ways because they are afraid of what people will say and react or how others will judge them. Instead of judging, we must rejoice, not that they committed a sin, but that they have turned from their sinful ways and come back to Christ in the fold of the Church.

Yet still, there are those who do not turn from their sins because they have grown used them and do not know any other life. Take the example of an addict. He does not know any life other than the one he is living. However, planting seeds of faith, watering them with kindness and love, and caring for them regularly will allow the Gospel of Christ to penetrate the toughest and driest sinfulness.

6. What is the younger son really saying when he asks for his inheritance from his father?

When the younger brother asks for his inheritance, in essence he is saying to his father, *you are dead to me*. No one gets their inheritance before the father dies and to receive the inheritance before the father dies is to say that the father is no longer important in one’s life. Very often we say the same thing to God. We may not ask for His inheritance, but we do say that you are dead to us and we ignore Him and do what we want instead of doing what He has asked us to do. We squander what He has given us (life and blessings) like the younger brother squandered his inheritance. But thanks be to God that He is a forgiving God, a loving father, and one who actively waits for our return to be reunited with Him and the rest of the Church. This is what the younger brother witnessed and each of us can experience when we change ourselves and dedicate our lives to the glory of Christ.

7. Why is it significant in the story that the younger son was willing to tend swine?

His willingness to tend swine shows how far the younger son had traveled from the Law of God’s covenant with Israel and the depths to which he had sunk into sin in his personal life.

The younger son’s anxiety, hunger, and homelessness are the result of his rebellion and enslavement to sin (Rom 1:25, 6:6; Gal 5:1) by which he has lost the freedom of being a beloved son of his father to become one whose sin has placed him under the power of Satan (Rom 8:21; Gal 4:31, 5:13).

8. The son was brought to repentance. How is true repentance different than regret, remorse, or even punishment?

True repentance is not wallowing in sorrow or beating yourself up for something you have done wrong. True repentance, the Greek word being *metanoia*, is the changing of your mind and your heart and your life. To have true repentance means to no longer make the sins you have committed and to rededicate yourself to Christ. When you repent with this understanding, you now become a true child of God. This is the purpose of Great Lent.

Great Lent is often referred to as a time of repentance, so Great Lent is the time when we change our lives, change

who we are and turn away from our sinful acts and the sins that control us and dedicate ourselves only to Christ. Naturally, we must not only change our lives during Great Lent, but must continue to have our lives be changed after Great Lent is over. We are called to be transformed by the Gospel of Christ and we live this in our everyday lives.

9. What do you think the fattened calf symbolizes which the father offers in celebration of his younger son's return?

The fattened calf the father offers upon his son's return symbolizes the restoration of communion with the father and the father's household in the same way a repentant sinner is restored to God's family through Holy Communion in Holy Badarak within the household of the Church.

The Pharisees and scribes to whom Jesus is directing His parable are displaying the same anger and unwillingness to welcome back the repentant sinners to whom Jesus' extends His mercy and forgiveness like the elder brother who will not welcome back his younger sibling. In addition, there is another comparison that can be made to the Jews of the Old Covenant who jealously guarded that status as "firstborn sons" in refusing to welcome their "younger brothers" of the Gentile nations into the New Covenant in Christ Jesus (see verses 29-30). The father in the parable manifests his love for the elder, upright son (symbolic of the Jews of the Sinai Covenant), but he reminds his elder son and heir that the younger son must be restored to the family and his restoration must be celebrated in the communion meal. It is a subtle warning Jesus gives that they must be prepared to welcome the repentant "younger brothers" of the Gentile nations into the Kingdom He has come to establish.

10. At the end of the parable, the older brother comes out to hear what is going on and is upset with his father for throwing a party for his younger brother who squandered everything. The older is mad and jealous at the attention the younger is receiving. Have you ever been jealous of another? What does this parable teach you about that type of situation?

In the parable the elder son has to make a decision: *will he accept the father's rebuke and welcome his younger brother back into communion with the family, or will he reject his younger brother and harm his relationship with his father?* We are not told what decision the elder brother made, but we know that many of the Jews rejected the Divine Father's plan for the restoration of the human family in Jesus' Gospel message of salvation. St. Paul wrote: *For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:26-29).*

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

Please complete the assignment by next class.

Memory Verse:

"...he was lost and is found, was dead and now is alive." (Luke 15:32)