

CUSTOMIZED PIGSTIES

A Devotional Meditation on Nitzavim (You Are Standing) and Vayalekh (And He Went)

Deuteronomy 29:10-31:30; Isaiah 61:10-63:9;
Genesis 3:1-23; Luke 15:1-32; Ephesians 2:11-15; 1 John 3:4

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Everyone knows the parable of the Prodigal Son. It's an illustration of how sinners can find forgiveness when they turn from their wicked ways and come back to God.

That's the basic meaning, but what exactly is a sinner? Is it someone who has never known the Savior, and never walked in our Heavenly Father's path of righteousness, or is it someone who has known Him, but walked off the path?

It helps to look at the context of Yeshua's parable. As Luke explains, the Prodigal was the third parable Yeshua told to address a specific situation:



The Prodigal Son. Image by ihave3kids, April 7, 2012, [via Flickr](#).

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to hear *Yeshua*. The Pharisees and the *Torah* scholars began to complain, saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So He told this parable to them, saying, "Which man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, will not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until he finds it? When he has found it, he puts it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says, 'Rejoice with me, for I've found my sheep that was lost!' I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one repenting sinner than over the ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance."

"Or which woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search thoroughly until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I've found the coin I had lost!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Luke 15:1-10 TLV

This context indicates that the Prodigal story applies to people who had once been connected to God, but departed from Him. The tax collectors and sinners who came to Yeshua were not strangers and foreigners, but native-born Hebrews who had walked away from God's Covenant with His chosen people and plunged into lifestyles of compromise. They may have gained something from oppressing their own people, or from banditry, prostitution, drug running, or whatever lawlessness defined their lives, but those gains paled in comparison to the curses they endured. The curses began with exclusion from the community, which is a kind of exile. The full range of curses included sickness,

violence, insecurity, lack of productivity, and enslavement to addictive substances and abusive masters.

This is where we get to the definition of sin. John writes:

Everyone practicing sin also practices lawlessness—indeed, sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4 TLV

The law we're supposed to follow is the way of righteousness God established in the beginning, but we walked away from that early in our human story. Our first ancestors knew the way of righteousness as God had revealed it, but strayed from it when the serpent's deception appealed to their selfish desires. They became prodigals who demanded their share of the inheritance, and fled from the Presence of the Almighty.

Their inheritance was to be like God, which is what they already had. If they had remained faithful, they, like the elder brother in Yeshua's story, would have heard from the Father, "you are always with me, and everything that is mine is yours." (Luke 15:31) Instead, they suffered the curses of shame, division, pain, unproductive toil, death, and exile from God's blessed land. In this sense, every human being is a prodigal. That is why God Himself had to go after us to find us and bring us back into His fold.

We should be able to agree on that much, but there's more. We don't like to think that we might fall prey to the same peril the Pharisees and Torah teachers shared with the elder brother in Yeshua's story. They found themselves at odds with the Father by complaining about His decision to welcome His wayward children back into the family. Which brings up another question: who is God's family?

God's family are the people related to Him by blood or adoption. Since we are all created in the image of God, but are not actually God, then our inclusion in His family is by adoption. We require a complete transformation before we can walk in the fulness of our identity as the image of our Creator. Before that, we walk through some significant difficulties – many of our own making because our untransformed selves prefer to squander the substance of our inheritance.

This is what God's family has always done. It happened with Noah, and it happened with Abraham, but always God holds open the way of return. That's what He told Moses when he renewed the covenant of adoption with His family after it had grown into the nation of Israel:

Now when all these things come upon you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart in all the nations where *Adonai* your God has banished you, and you return to *Adonai* your God and listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you today—you and your children—with all your heart and with all your soul, then *Adonai* your God will bring you back from captivity and have compassion on you, and He will return and gather you from all the peoples where *Adonai* your God has scattered you. Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the heavens, from there *Adonai* your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. *Adonai* your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, and you will possess it; and He will do you good and multiply you more than your fathers. Also *Adonai* your God will circumcise your heart and

the heart of your descendants—to love *Adonai* your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

Deuteronomy 30:1-6 TLV

This is not just a Jewish thing; it's a humanity thing. Israel is God's family, and He invites every person to be part of it. That's why Moses prefaced his remarks by saying,

You are standing today, all of you, before *Adonai* your God—the heads of your tribes, your elders, your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, and the outsider within your camp. . . .

Deuteronomy 29:10 TLV

This is just one example of how strangers and foreigners could take part in redemption along with the native born. That's how God creates one new man from every tribe and tongue and nation.

It's up to us: we can stay in the pigsties of this world, ignorant of our true identity, or we can humble ourselves and learn about who we are. We could also choose to be offended at people who don't meet our standards of acceptability, but whom our Father still calls His children. Be careful, though! That choice could mean we are still prodigals living in customized pigsties of our own.