

COMING HOME

INTRODUCTION

The Jews believed that the God they worshiped created the heavens and the earth. He was therefore too big and great a God to be confined to any one nation or place. When the Hebrew people sojourned in the wilderness, they knew that God went with them wherever they travelled. During this time, they built a Tabernacle, a portable place of worship to help them encounter the living God. Wherever they journeyed, the Tabernacle went with them. The portable structure serving as a physical reminder that God was always present, sharing their life journey. When they camped, they placed the Tabernacle at the center of the tribes to remind them that God was at the center of their life together.

We Christians are the spiritual descendants of the Jews. We have never believed that the worship of God could be confined to a specific place or land. We worship God in Spirit and truth. We know that we can worship God anywhere and anyplace, in any language and in any culture.

The early Christians were scattered throughout the ancient Roman Empire. They were a people of many languages, races and nationalities. Though they were part of many different peoples, they saw their ultimate identity through the lens of faith. Their primary loyalty belonged not to their country, class or race, but to the Kingdom of God. Their witness challenges us to do likewise. Where does our loyalty lie? Hopefully not with any power of this world, but with the King of Kings.

In this study we will be examining the concept of home. Is there a word that resonates more deeply with the human spirit, than home? It is a place of security and safety, of love and family. We all want a place that we can call home.

Yet coming home can be difficult and filled with questions. Will my family welcome me? Can they forgive my failures? Can I forgive theirs? And what about the spiritual dimension? What does it mean for us who are part of a pilgrim people to come home? Our ultimate home is with God. To truly come home requires us to come home to God.

For the next few weeks we will be looking at homecoming stories in the Bible. These stories will challenge us to consider what kind of welcome we can hope for and what kind of welcome we give. We will look at some of the most famous stories in the Bible as well as some of the least known. We'll look at the story of the Prodigal son as well as the stories of Ruth and Joseph, Jacob and Onesimus. Above all I pray that these stories will invite you to find your eternal home with our Savior Jesus Christ.

God Bless,
Pastor John

LESSON ONE

THE PRODIGAL SON

LUKE 15:11-32

INTRODUCTION

John 3:16 tells us of God's love, but no passage in the Bible does a better job of explaining what God's love looks like than Luke chapter 15. It tells of the passion God has for the last, the least and the lost. Especially the lost. The parable of the Prodigal Son is really the story of two brothers; one who gets lost far from home and one who gets lost without ever leaving home. It is above all the story of a Father's love and forgiveness. It calls us to consider two questions. Are we ready to come home to our heavenly Father? And what kind of welcome do we extend to our brother when he comes home? Ultimately, it is all about grace.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Read the first few verses of chapter 15. Who is the audience for the parables of chapter 15?

- 2) What did the younger son ask of his father?

- 3) What was the younger son reduced to doing to survive when his fortune was gone?

4) How did the Father welcome home his son?

5) How did the older brother react to the arrival of his brother?

6) What did the father say to the older brother?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) How deep was the rift between the father and the younger son?

2) Did the younger son truly repent, or did he just need to come home?

3) Why would the father welcome the son home in such an extravagant manner?

4) Why was the older brother so unhappy to have his brother return?

5) The story ends without us hearing the older brother's reaction to his father's words. Why might that have been intentional?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Which character do you relate to in the story and why?

2) Have you ever been in the same situation as the younger son? The Father? The older son?

3) Who do you think this story is addressed to?

4) Obviously the father in the story is supposed to represent God. Given that, how do you feel about the way the father responded to his sons?

5) How do you think the older son responded to the father's words? How would you respond?

A Prayer Prompted by Luke 15

Heavenly Father,

We have sinned against you and are not worthy to be called your children. Yet that is what you call us once we put our faith in Christ. Thank you for receiving us into your family. Thank you for receiving us, like lost sheep, back into the fold.

We thank you further for seeking us out as the shepherd would seek the lost sheep or the woman would seek the lost coin in the parables. You show us how much you value us that you did not leave us in our lost state, but sought us out so that we might turn to you.

Help us to appreciate the joy that fills heaven over each sinner that repents. Help us to share that same joy. Help us, now that we are walking with you, to be among those who join you in bringing other lost sheep back into the fold. We know that there are many other prodigals much like ourselves who need to return to you.

Please give us the privilege of seeing the lost found and returning to you.

In Christ,

Amen

By David Kosbucki

LESSON TWO
JACOB COMES HOME
Genesis: 32

INTRODUCTION

This is part of a much larger story. Esau and Jacob were twin brothers, sons of Isaac and Rebekah. They did not get along. Through trickery, Esau robbed his brother of his birthright. His brother was not happy. Fearing for his life Esau fled the country and went to live with his uncle Laban in a faraway land, He stayed there for 21 years, until relations with his uncle soured. Now fleeing from his uncle he had no choice but to return home to his brother. But how would he be received? Jacob does what he can to appease his brother, sending gifts. He does what he can to protect his family, making himself vulnerable for their safety. In the night as he awaits his brother, he encounters the living God.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) How many men did Esau bring with him for his encounter with Jacob?

- 2) How many gifts did Jacob offer to Esau?

- 3) Who did Jacob wrestle with during the night?

- 4) Did Jacob win the wrestling match?

5) What gifts did Jacob receive from the one he wrestled with?

6) Look ahead to chapter 33. How did Esau receive his brother Jacob?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) Describe Jacob's strategy in meeting Esau. Is it a good one?

2) Why did Jacob divide up his family in the way he did?

3) Jacob wrestles all night. What is the significance of this encounter?

4) Jacob gets a new name. What does it mean and why is it significant?

5) Jacob becomes permanently limp from the encounter. Is that a blessing or a curse?

6) To what degree were Jacob and Esau reconciled? Jacob and God?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Have you ever had to come to grips with your life? Did it also mean that you had to come to grips with God?

2) The figure that Jacob wrestled with is variously described as a man, an angel and as God? Which do you think it was? Could it in some way have been all three? How?

3) Jacob is changed from his encounter with God. Have you ever encountered God and been changed?

4) Jacob limps after his encounter. That would seem to be a negative, but others think it actually could be seen as a blessing. Have you ever had something negative happen and yet (with god's help) had it turn into a positive?

5) Jacob and Esau were reconciled to some degree. Have you experienced reconciliation in your life?

PRAYER

God, we confess to you that sometimes our worries seem too big. We don't see a way out of our current situation, and your timing seems different than what we would have chosen. But we know and believe that no matter how much we've struggled, you alone can see the big picture. We praise you. You are with us in it all.

Help us to hear your voice through the difficult days. Help us to set our eyes on you alone. Help us to keep moving in the direction you are leading us. Thank you for your reminders that through every weakness and hard place, your strength is displayed in beautiful ways through our lives. We can't do it on our own Lord. We're so freshly aware of that. But you can work your great miracles in us, and through us.

Thank you that this battle will never have the final say over our lives. And because of your power and compassion, we will come through to the other side, with greater perseverance, stronger faith, and deeper awareness of your presence with us. Help us know you are fighting for us, and will bring us out as gold.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

From ibelieve.com

LESSON THREE

RUTH AND NAOMI COME HOME

THE BOOK OF RUTH

INTRODUCTION

The story of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges (the days before Israel had a king). Naomi and her husband Elimelech live in Bethlehem with their two sons Mahlon and Chilion. They are subsistence farmers. A drought comes and in their poverty they decide to leave Israel and move to Moab. There, the two sons marry Moabite wives. But then tragedy strikes and one by one all the men of the family die. In despair Naomi decides to return home to Bethlehem. One daughter-in-law, Oprah, decides to stay in Moab. The other, Ruth, decides to remain with Naomi and move to Bethlehem with her. Ruth is making a bold move to a new home. It is an act of love, of faith, of loyalty and of hope.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) When Naomi returned home she asked that everyone call her by a new name.

What was it and what did it mean?

2) In Bethlehem, what did Ruth propose to do to help her and Naomi to survive?

3) What did Boaz do to help Ruth?

4) What does Ruth do to pursue Boaz?

5) What does Boaz do to cement his relationship with Ruth?

6) What important descendants come from Ruth and Boaz?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What was the purpose of gleaning in ancient Israel?

2) Describe the three main characters in our story: Ruth, Naomi and Boaz.

3) What attracted Ruth to Boaz? Boaz to Ruth?

4) What kind of role does faith play in this story?

5) Who was blessed by whom in the story and how?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Which character in the story do you most identify with? Why?

2) Naomi was overcome by bitterness. Have you ever felt that way?

3) What about Ruth do you most admire? Is there anything about her that you don't like?

4) What do you think of Boaz? Why?

5) What does the list of Ruth's descendants have to tell us about how God acts in the world?

PRAYER

Dear God,

Thank you for your great love and blessing over our lives. Thank you that your favor has no end, but it lasts for our entire lifetime. Forgive us for sometimes forgetting that you are intimately acquainted with all of our ways, that you know what concerns us, and you cover us, as with a shield. We ask for your guidance so that we might walk fully in your blessing and goodness today. We ask that your face would shine on us. That you would open the right doors for our lives and for our loved ones, that you would close the wrong doors and protect us from those we need to walk away from. Establish the work of our hands and bring to fulfillment all that you have given us to do in these days. We pray that you would make our way purposeful and our footsteps firm out of your goodness and love. Give us a heart of wisdom to hear your voice, and make us strong by your huge favor and grace.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

From crosswalk.com

4) Who did Joseph greet first?

5) How did Pharaoh react to news of Joseph's brothers being in Egypt?

6) How did Joseph's father Jacob take the news?

LESSON TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) Why did Joseph wait so long to reveal himself to his brothers?

2) The doctrine of providence is at work in this story. Joseph feels that his arrival in Egypt was a part of God's plan to rescue His people. What do you make of this application of the doctrine of providence?

3) How complete was Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers?

4) Did Joseph's brothers trust his forgiveness?

5) What was the result of all this for the people of Israel?

LESSON THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Has anyone really wronged you in a major way?

2) Do you ever have revenge fantasies about what you would do if your enemies/opponents were to fall into your hands?

3) What would you do if you really had the chance to get even?

4) How capable are you of truly forgiving those who have wronged you?

5) How strongly do you believe in the doctrine of providence?

PRAYER

Lord, sometimes it's easy to wallow in my problems and my hardships. Thank You for the story of Joseph that reminds me that sometimes You let troubles come into my life so I can do something important to You and possibly even life-saving to others. Help me to keep my daily struggles in perspective. And open my eyes to how my current and past problems can help others. Use me to Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

From heartlight.org

LESSON FIVE

MOSES' HOMECOMING

EXODUS 4:18-5:23

INTRODUCTION

The story of Moses is a familiar one to all Christians. While living as a shepherd in Midian, God appeared to Moses and told him that He had heard the cry of His people. He was going to rescue them from slavery in Egypt and Moses was to be the instrument God used to free them. Moses, who had left Egypt a fugitive, had to return to the land of his birth and convince Pharaoh to “let my people go.” What a mission! The stakes were sky high and the pressure immense. What was it like for Moses to come home again?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) What happened to the people in Egypt who had sought to take Moses' life?

- 2) What weird event happened to Moses and Zipporah on the way to Egypt?

- 3) How did the elders of Israel first receive Moses?

- 4) How did Pharaoh receive Moses' message?

5) After Pharaoh increased their labors, what did the Hebrew leaders tell Moses?

6) At the end of chapter five, what did Moses tell God?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) Why was God upset with Moses' failure to circumcise his children?

2) What did it mean for God to harden Pharaoh's heart?

3) What do you make of the way the Hebrew elders responded to Moses?

4) Do you think Pharaoh's strategic response was a good one?

5) Was Moses right to complain to God?

PART THREE:HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Have you ever been called on to take on a task that seemed overwhelming?

2) Moses was called on to lead and yet he resisted doing even the most basic act of obedience. Leaders lead. Have you ever tried to lead others without doing the most basic of tasks? Have you known others who did so?

3) Freeing the Hebrews was an immense task, yet Moses and the Hebrew people wanted it to happen immediately. How patient are you with God's timing?

4) Do you think that Pharaoh and the Egyptian people deserved the plagues?

5) Do you ever complain to God? Do you think that is an okay thing to do?

PRAYER

Oh God, help us with our perspective. Help us to trust in you in the middle of circumstances in the short term and maybe even for a long time in the short term. I think about brothers and sisters around the world who have been in prison for years, much like Joseph was in the book of Genesis, and wondering, "God, where are you in this? Lord, I did this, and now this is happening in my life. This is happening to my family while I'm in prison." I think about different circumstances that people are walking through right now, and they're wondering, "God, where are you in this? I'm trusting in you, but I just don't see you working, and I want you to work in this way or that way today, like now."

God, give us faith to trust in you in the short term and the long term. God, help us to trust in you today knowing that you see things we don't see, that you're doing things we can't even imagine, and we trust that as we obey you, help us to keep obeying you. Please help us, just like you did Moses, to keep walking in obedience in you even when the circumstances cause us to question that. As we walk with you, we trust that you will show yourself as a good and loving God in the long term. We are banking our lives for eternity on that.

We praise you for the cross, Jesus, for the way you show this to us. You died on the cross. In the short term, this looked like tragedy, yet three days later you rose from the dead in total triumph. You have risen from the dead and you are alive now and forever more. Absolutely, oh God, you can be trusted in the long term. Help us to live today with trust in you, knowing you will prove that you are faithful, and good, and loving for all of eternity.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.'

David Platt

LESSON SIX
JESUS COMES HOME
LUKE 4:14-30

INTRODUCTION

Right after Jesus' baptism He went into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan. Upon His return, the gospel of Luke tells us that He traveled around the synagogues of Galilee, preaching and teaching. Then He went to His home town of Nazareth where He preached His first sermon. Initially He was well received, but then things went south. Relationships got so bad that the mob drove Jesus out of town to a nearby hill where they almost threw him off a cliff. What a start for His ministry!

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) Jesus preached in the synagogues of Galilee. How was His teaching initially received?

2) From what book of the Bible did Jesus read?

3) What did Jesus say about the prophet's words?

4) What did Jesus say that so offended the people of Nazareth?

5) How did Jesus avoid being murdered by the mob?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What did Jesus mean when He said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in our hearing?"

2) Why would the people be happy to hear that the words of Isaiah were to be fulfilled this day?

3) What was the gist of what Jesus said in verses 23-27?

4) Why were the people of Nazareth so offended and enraged by what Jesus said?

5) Was Jesus escape from the mob miraculous?

Prayer of Confession (Inspired by Luke 4:14-30)

God, we do not understand Jesus, the prophet.

We do not want to get our hands dirty with the poor,
the oppressed, the prisoners.

Forgive us for being insulated and isolated.

Open our hearts to the poor
and help us to love them as you love them,
working to bring in the good news of the reign of God.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

from Waiting for Water: Liturgy for the Easter Journey

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) Does this letter have anything to tell us about the institution of slavery?

- 2) How would you describe Paul's relationship with Philemon? Is that significant as to how he writes and the arguments he makes?

- 3) Why is Paul sending Onesimus back?

- 4) What kind of pressure will this letter give to Philemon?

- 5) Is Paul confident of what will happen?

PART THREE: HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO US?

- 1) Have you ever had to ask someone for a really big favor? How did you go about it? Would it have mattered if they "owed" you?

2) Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison, facing possible execution. How do you think that affected his approach to this letter?

3) How would you feel if you were Philemon receiving this letter?

4) How would you feel if you were Onesimus going back home to Philemon?

5) What do you think happened to Onesimus?

6) If you were Paul, would you have changed this letter in any way?

Try praying the prayer that Paul used in this letter

4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, **5** because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. **6** I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. **7** Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.