

# CAPITOL STUDIES

MAY 19, 2021 • WEEK 19



SEVEN DEADLY  
SINS AND CIVIL  
SERVANTS:  
SPECIAL TOPICS

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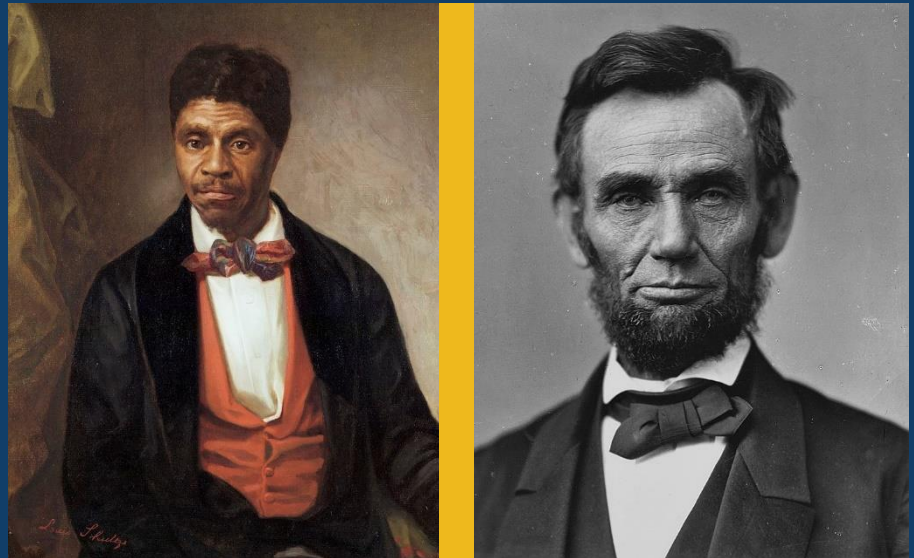


## Verse of the Week

Luke 15:23b-24a

*[The father said,]  
“Let us eat and  
celebrate; for this  
son of mine was  
dead and has come  
to life again; he was  
lost and has been  
found.”*

## Parable of the Prodigal’s Family



SLAVERY IN AMERICA WAS A NATIONAL SCOURGE of sin, pride, racial prejudice, deep theological error, and inhumane greed. Most of the Christian founding fathers, including Washington and Jefferson, worked for slavery’s abolition. Abraham Lincoln proved to be a wise and loving father to both the northern and southern children of the land when he ignored not the law but the immoral 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision by the Supreme Court. Rightly ignoring its foolish opinion, he progressed confidently on a road of emancipation. The devil’s claws were not easily extracted, and a most bloody Civil War raged. One gentleman questioned Lincoln about how he would treat the rebellious southerners when they had been defeated, returning to the Union. The enquirer expected that Lincoln would take dire vengeance, but he answered, “I will treat them as if they had never been away.”<sup>1</sup>

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier, V. D. M.

*(This study is adapted from an earlier series by Rev. Gauthier, 1960–2020.)*



## INTRODUCTION

Jesus was no stranger to forgiveness, to the foolish opinions of political leaders, or to the devastation of nations from wars and rumors of wars. He knew social sins and deep theological errors tore apart nations, for “sin is a reproach to any nation.”<sup>2</sup> In our passage today, Luke alone recorded the most popular of Jesus’ 80 parables—The Parable of the Prodigal Son. Luke wanted to exhibit for the government official Theophilus not a nation torn asunder but a family torn apart by sin and pride. While the prodigal son was no hero in this masterful short story, his southbound sin made him world famous. The “Parable of the Prodigal’s Family” focuses on its father figure—a wise, wealthy, principled, moral, ever-steady, forgiving father who was not unlike our nation’s fatherly 16th President—steadfast on principle and intent on unity.

### 1. SETTING THE STAGE

Let us read, as Theophilus did, what would become the world’s most famous short story. Its 22 verses comprise three parables in one:

1. The Parable of a **Prodigal Lad** (vv. 11-19)
2. The Parable of a **Loving Dad** (vv. 20-24)
3. The Parable of a **Son who was Mad** (vv. 25-32)

Jesus told this parable because of the ongoing attacks from the constantly antagonistic Pharisees. Over a year had passed since Jesus called greedy Levi out of his covetous lifestyle in Luke 5, but not much had changed with those enemies. They had grumbled against Him for dining with “those *sick* sinners” in Levi’s party mansion. Now, ten chapters later (six months before Jesus would take up His cross in Jerusalem), something *had* changed. His ministry was increasingly under fire—the pressure rose as His death became imminent. Hear the scribes’ self-righteous attack on Jesus for still being the “friend of sinners.”

*Luke 15:1-2*

*Tax collectors and sinners were coming near Him to listen. <sup>2</sup>Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”<sup>3</sup>*

To these men it was not self-evident that in the Creator’s eyes all men are equally sinful.

### 2. THE PARABLE OF A PRODIGAL LAD: A PICTURE OF A BLATANT SINNER

*Luke 15:11-12*

*So Jesus further explained, “A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, you must give me the share of the estate that will fall to me.’ So the father divided his wealth between both sons.”*



A master storyteller, Jesus used legal, technical terms of Mediterranean culture to tell of deep family betrayal and a second-born son's desire to burn family bridges with an unheard-of request for an early inheritance. Enamored by the glitter and glitz of this world, the impatient youth abandoned his bedroom with a note: "I'm sick of your rules, Dad.... Now give me all my stuff." He loves not his father but only his father's things. In effect, he said, "I wish you were dead." Silently, the father split his net worth into one third and two thirds. The son pulled rank and then pulled anchor, stunning Jesus' listeners.

### GOD GIVES SINNERS THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE THEIR COURSE OF INIQUITY.

*Luke 15:13-16*

*It did not take that many days for the younger son to sell and liquidate his land and property. He went on a journey to a Gentile country, and there he squandered his entire estate by living it up in an unsaved, unrestrained, prodigal way. <sup>14</sup>Now after he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. <sup>15</sup>So he went and tried to cling to a citizen of that country, but he instead sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup>And he was longing to fill his stomach with the carob-pod husks that the swine were eating, and yet continually, no one would give him any food at all.*

Not a voiceless cardboard cutout, the young son expressed his aspiration for emancipation to his outdated, patriarchal dad whom he could not stand. He dove headlong into "the party life" and unrestrained self-expression. Sadly, his money (and his friends) ran out, leaving him with a throbbing hangover of shame and loneliness. Providentially, a fierce famine rose like a voracious beast, biting into the neck of the entire Gentile countryside. Reduced to humiliation, despair, and begging, he clung to work without any promise of food, doing the unimaginable—becoming a Jewish swineherd. The story's second-born sinner sat among moving snouts, hog snorts, blank eyes, and pig manure. He stared off to a distant setting. Entranced, he saw not his country or his village. He saw his father's house. The son had a wakeup call. We might say, "He came to." He finally reacted to the slow pulse beat of conscience. He repented.

### SIN IS MORAL INSANITY.

*Luke 15:17-19*

*When he came to his senses, he thought, "How many of my father's hired house servants are surrounded by bread, but I am dying here—starving! <sup>18</sup>I will rise up and go to my father, and ask him, 'Father, I have sinned, even unto heaven and also in your eyes; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of the men you hire for the day.'"*

Jesus stopped narrating to let us hear a son's silent soliloquy, a mental monologue, a three-part, pre-planned confession, ending with a request of reentry to his father's life at the bottom of three tiers in the ancient work world—as a work-a-day temporary helper. So ends the Parable of the Prodigal Lad—a picture of *the blatant sinner*.





### 3. THE PARABLE OF A LOVING DAD: A PICTURE OF GOD AS HE REALLY IS

*Luke 15:20-21*

*So the prodigal son rose up and set out to his father. A very long way off, he was, when his father saw him and, feeling deep compassion for the boy, ran to him, fell on his neck, and vigorously kissed him. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned, even unto heaven and also in your eyes; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”*

Humble confession is good for the soul. It restores relationships. It is a beautiful thing. Yet even more beautiful is Jesus’ masterful portrayal of the forgiving heart of a loving God who scanned the day-lit horizon for His wandering, sinning, second son to come home. Middle Eastern noblemen did not run, especially in public, but he did. His heart was bursting with forgiving grace. He wanted to protect this boy who had shamed him from the taunts of the bustling village’s busy people. The prodigal attempted the rehearsed confession word-for-word, yet the father interrupted, disallowing him to “earn” his sonship back. He was family and was lovingly forgiven “by grace, not by works.”<sup>4</sup>

*Luke 15:22-24*

*But the father commanded the house servants, “Quickly bring out the estate’s best robe, dress him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; <sup>23</sup>and bring the fat, grass-fed calf, slaughter it, and eating, we must celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine had been dead and has come to life again; he had been in a lengthy state of lostness but now has been found!” And they began to celebrate.*

The son returned home in hopes of reentry lowlier than a household servant but received a spine-popping bear hug and lavish public kisses. He also received three gifts to remark his sonship: (1) the family **ring** (giving him the power of attorney); (2) the exquisite, flowing, long, patriarchal **robe**, reserved only for use at rare, state occasions; and (3), unlike the unshod slaves, this dad’s repentant child got **shoes**.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE SLAVES’ DREAM IN THE FAMOUS OLD SPIRITUAL WAS OF A TIME WHEN “ALL GOD’S CHILDREN GOT SHOES.”<sup>6</sup>

There was strong reason to celebrate lavishly. Clapping his mighty hands, the father sent servants scurrying into hours of preparation for this feast. Meats were costly and rarely eaten, but tonight there was meat enough for a whole village. God’s lavish love longs for all sinners (*blatant and otherwise*) to repent and return to Him. So ends the Parable of the Loving Dad—a picture of God as He *really* is.

### 4. THE PARABLE OF A SON WHO WAS MAD: A PICTURE OF A SINFULLY SELF-RIGHTEOUS GOODY TWO-SHOES

*Luke 15:25-27*

*Now the older son was working in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music\* and dancing\*. <sup>26</sup>So he*



*summoned one of the young servants and kept asking him about what these things could be. <sup>27</sup>And the young lad said to him, “Your brother has come, and your father has slaughtered the fat, grass-fed calf because he has received him back healthy, safe, and sound.”*

That party mansion’s “music & dancing” was literally “symphony\* & chorus\*” (συμφωνηα & χορωσ). A now furious first-born’s blood pressure spiked, hearing high-pitched eastern flutes shrilling above the other instruments.

*Luke 15:28-30*

*But he became lividly angry and kept refusing to go into the celebration, so his father came out and began pleading with him. <sup>29</sup>But he rebutted and said to his father, “Look you! For so many years I have been slaving for you, and I have never even neglected one single command of yours; yet you have never given me a young goat, so I might celebrate with my good friends; <sup>30</sup>but when this son of yours came, who devoured your life’s wealth with his prostitutes, you killed the fat, grass-fed calf for him!”*

Grinning performers danced in circular, Israeli style with handclaps and joyous shouts, but the son who was “the insider” refused to go inside. Pride-filled religionists cannot rejoice when sick sinners, blatant sinners, and self-expressive sinners repent. Why not? They believe life and faith are not grace-based but works-based. He would not go in, so again, a loving father moved towards a sinful son.

*Luke 15:31-32*

*And the father said to him, “My child, you have always been with me, and all that I had is now yours. <sup>32</sup>But it was necessary for us to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.”*

Affectionate and initiatory, the father came out “to seek and to save that which was lost.”<sup>7</sup> Now the lost son was the elder, sour, goody two-shoes, the prideful, hard-working, prim, and proper brother. So far he had been offstage—his character unrevealed. We now see he *did not care for his father* but also *just wanted his stuff*. His long-smoldering resentments boiled to the top. He accused his father of playing favorites. Irony abounded—the “obedient” son was fiercely disobedient, and the gracious father was made to look unfaithful and unfair.<sup>8</sup> The elder brother was a religionist—“holier-than-thou!” So ends the Parable of the Son who was Mad—a picture of the *religious, prideful, and self-righteous sinner*.

## CONCLUSION: IS GOD A PRODIGAL GOD?

Dear Senator: During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was purportedly asked if God was on his side. He said, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side.” Continuing:

**PRESIDENT LINCOLN SAID, “MY GREATEST CONCERN IS TO BE ON GOD’S SIDE, FOR GOD IS ALWAYS RIGHT.”<sup>9</sup>**





Most people erroneously think that salvation and forgiveness are based on merit and being “good enough” for forgiveness. God runs from such an idea. In that sense, know that God is a prodigal God. He is a forgiving and gracious Father. He longs for every sort of sinning son within the collective family of humanity to “come home” and be in joyous relationship with Him, caring more for Him than for “His stuff.” If you have sinned blatantly in self-expression or religiously in self-righteous pride, God is still for you. He loves you. He is on your side. Will you “go in” to His lavish celebration of relationship and forgiveness? May you be saved by grace and faith alone!

A sinner yet a son because of the Savior,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier

## FOOTNOTES

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke (The Daily Study Bible)*, First Edition, Westminster Press, 1953, pg. 213.
2. This is a slight paraphrase of Proverbs 14:34 – “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (NKJV).
3. All Scripture quotations are from my own translational paraphrase, based on the *New American Standard Bible 1995 Update*, made carefully, reverently, and respectfully after diligent study work in the original Greek Scriptures.
4. Ephesians 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
5. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament (Volume II: The Gospel According to Luke)*, Baker Book House, 1930, pg. 211.
6. Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, pg. 212.
7. Luke 19:10 – [Jesus said,] “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
8. Darrell L. Bock, *The Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*, Baker Books, 1994, pg. 1313.
9. It is difficult to find a historical source for this quote, although it is widely referred to in various modern writings. It is somewhat similar to some private thoughts written down by Lincoln in 1862 and preserved by his secretary, which said, “The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both *may* be, and one *must* be, wrong. God cannot be *for* and *against* the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party” (<http://abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/meditat.htm>). In his Second Inaugural Address in 1865, Lincoln expressed a similar idea when he said, “Both [North and South] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. ...The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes” (<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/in-aug2.htm>). It seems Lincoln did want to know the will of God and to be on His side.

# Personal Study Notes

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## Verse of the Week

Luke 15:23b-24a  
 [The father said,]  
 “Let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”



### WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Meets during the 107<sup>th</sup>  
 Legislature’s First Session

#### SENATORS

6:45–8:00 A.M. Wednesdays  
 Room 1022, *Facilitated by Sen. Clements & Sen. Arch*

#### STAFF

12:00 P.M. Wednesdays  
 Room 1022, *Facilitated by Joel Hunt*



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