

# The Parable of Parsi and Proddy

Hespeler, 27 March 2022 © Scott McAndless – Lent 4

Joshua 5:9-12, Psalm 32, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, [Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)

**F**or two long years he had nursed his grudge. He had done so, he felt, for very good reason. He had always known that his little brother was a bit of an idiot. And I know, I know, almost all big brothers believe that, but he knew it was especially true in this case. Even as an infant, the boy had been wasteful about everything. When big brother was called upon to help out and feed his little brother his lunch, the food – cheerios, dunkaroos, brussels sprouts – would always end up strewn all over the floor and yet the boy would still be asking for more.

## Proddy and Parsi

When he was about eleven years old, big brother found a dictionary. He looked up a word that would perfectly describe his brother. That was when he stumbled on the word *prodigal*: a person who spends resources in a recklessly extravagant way. It seemed perfect, and so from that day forward he resolved that that was what he would call his brother. Soon the nickname caught on with the entire family – Prodigal; they started calling him Proddy for short.

The next day, the younger brother sought some revenge on his elder and tried to come up with a nickname for him. He took the dictionary and looked up a word for someone who was stingy and unwilling to give anything. He found the word *parsimonious* and gave that to his brother. That one stuck too: Parsi for short.

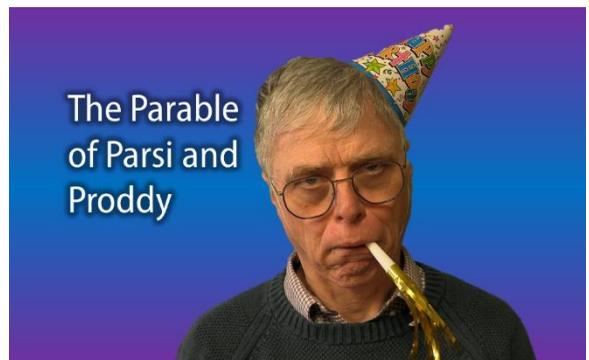
## A Wasteful Lifestyle

Proddy didn't really mature as he got older. Anything that he did – any job or chore that he took on – he managed to carry out in the most wasteful way possible. When the time came for him to go out for some higher education, of course he chose to go for the most expensive program that would never lead to any sort of lucrative job opportunities. That's right, he went for a theology degree.

Proddy just never seemed to learn. But what really bothered Parsi was that his father never seemed to learn either. He just kept on enabling Proddy. Whatever crazy scheme he came up with, somehow their dad just found a way to go along with it. And so, he was somehow not all that shocked when Proddy told him about his most ridiculous idea yet.

## A Bad Idea

“Hey, Parsi, “Proddy said one day, “you know how Dad is getting a little bit long in the tooth these days. I’ve been thinking. Someday, when he’s finally gone, everything that he owns will be passed on to us. And I know, that you, as the eldest, will get the biggest share. I don’t see how that’s fair, but I know that’s how it’s going to be.



So, I was thinking. What if I were to go to the old man today and ask him if I could have my share of the inheritance now while I can still have a bit of fun with it. What do you think?"

"Oh man, this is it," Parsi thought to himself. "Proddy has finally gone too far. When he goes to Dad with this idea, he is going to freak out. I mean, it's almost as if he was telling Dad that he wishes he was already dead." So he told his brother to go ahead and ask and see what happened. Imagine his surprise, therefore, when Proddy came back a few minutes later and he asked, barely able to contain his glee, "So, how did it go?"

I don't think I need to tell you that his jaw dropped when his brother responded, "Fantastic, Dad said that he was fine with the idea. He said to just give him a couple of days to get his affairs in order and he'll have the money ready for me." "Fantastic," replied Parsi.

## Proddy Leaves

It only took a matter of days, once Proddy had received his inheritance, for him to pack up and head out into the big wild world. The older brother tried to talk to their father about it, tried to convince him that this was going to be nothing but a disaster that would bring shame on the family name, but the father would hear none of it. He just said that, someday, Proddy would come to his senses and come home. He would wait for that day and welcome him when he arrived. In fact, since Proddy had left, the old man seemed to spend every hour he could standing and watching the road approaching the house. Everyone knew that he was doing nothing but waiting for the first glimpse of his son.

But Parsi was not going to just wait. He knew that this was going to be a disaster and he resolved that he would document it and throw it all in his father's face when the day came. Through his father's business connections, he managed to put together a network of informants who would keep an eye on what Proddy was doing with his inheritance. They began to report back at regular intervals and every time he received the report, Parsi got more and more enraged.

## Bad Reports

He somehow wasn't surprised to hear all of the ways in which Proddy was wasting his wealth on parties and luxuries. He was scandalized when he got word that he had been spending money on prostitutes, but he made sure that he got all the proof of it. Oh, how superior he would feel when he showed that evidence to his father.

After a while, he began to receive a very different kind of report. Apparently, Proddy's money had run out and there had been a famine in that far off land. When he heard the report that Proddy had been reduced to working for a pig farmer, his brother laughed and laughed and laughed. He had the most intense experience of schadenfreude – of joy at the misfortune of somebody else – he had ever had in his life.

## Surprise Party

One night, several weeks later, the older brother was coming back home after a long day's work in the fields. He was just expecting to have a late supper and a few quiet hours at home before turning in. But, much to his surprise, the house was anything but quiet. He heard music playing and the sound of people dancing. Everyone seemed to be having a grand old time. He

quickly called over one of his father's servants to ask what was going on and the man joyfully explained that Proddy had finally returned home. The father had sacrificed his best young calf and everyone was busy feasting and celebrating. It was a party, and the older son should come and join in.

I don't think it will surprise you when I say that Parsi was not happy. He absolutely refused to come any closer to the house. Finally, his father came out and began to beg him to come in. It was at this point that Parsi gleefully pulled out all of the information he had been documenting on his brother for the past few years. He had been carrying it with him every moment of every day all this time waiting for this very opportunity. He began to relate all of the irresponsible things that Proddy had done with their father's wealth. He ended with a flourish, pulling out a huge stack of copies of receipts from various brothels in the distant land. "Look, Father," he cried, "can you believe what Proddy spent on prostitutes alone?"

But the father just looked at him sadly. **"Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours."** he said. **"But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."**

## What we Should Call the Parable

The parable that we read this morning is popularly known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Of course, Jesus never called it that and neither did the author of The Gospel of Luke in which it appears. It was tradition that decided a very long time ago that this parable was all about the younger son, the prodigal or Proddy for short. But I am pretty sure that tradition is wrong about that.

Oh, there is no question that the younger son's story is very important and meaningful. In fact, it is a wonderful story that has brought a great deal of comfort to people down through the ages. It stands as a great teaching that, no matter what mistakes you've made, how much you have messed up your life and done everything wrong, there is always a way back to God and God is ready to welcome you with open arms and perfect love and approval.

So what Proddy went through is important, it is just not the main reason why Jesus told the story. He told it, apparently, because **"the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"** He told it specifically because there were people who were criticizing the fact that Jesus was celebrating and partying with the wrong sorts of people. He was telling it to a bunch of party poopers. And who, do you suppose, is the party pooper in this parable? This is not the Parable of the Prodigal, it is a parable of the sanctimonious Parsimonious brother! It is the Parable of the Party Pooper.

## Did he Go to the Party?

Let me just ask you the only question that Jesus' parable leaves open: did the elder son go to the party? Did he give into his father's pleas and join in the celebration? Or did he just keep sulking? In a way, that's the only question that matters. Because, if I understand anything that Jesus is saying with this and other parables like it, the point of the parable is the party. The kingdom of God is what you discover in the middle of that kind of celebration. The message of the parable,

therefore, is that even if you make all kinds of mistakes, even if you waste every opportunity that is sent your way, even if you make some wicked choices, you are not cut off from the promise of God's Kingdom because God is like that father in the story. God is gracious and welcoming to those who lose their way.

But if you hold on to your resentment against those who, in your mind, don't deserve to be forgiven, if you are much more interested in cataloging the sins of those who have gone wrong and telling them their mistakes and sanctimoniously declaring how they are not worthy of God's love, you are very much in danger of cutting yourself off from the celebration, which is to say from the kingdom of God.

## How we Cut Ourselves Off

Now, please do note what I'm saying here. I'm not saying that *God* is going to cut you off from the kingdom. I'm not saying that *God* will refuse you entrance. I'm just saying that you've cut yourself off. To understand the difference, let's return to the parable and imagine a certain outcome. Let us say that the father somehow convinced his eldest son, Parsi, that he had to come into the party. Perhaps he made him feel as if it was his duty or turned it into an obligation in some other way. But, because it was simply an obligation, Parsi attended while still holding onto all of his resentment, judgment and grievances against his brother.

How do you think that Parsi would have looked as he sat in the corner at that party? Yes, pretty much like that. Is there any sense in which someone who looks like that is really attending a party? Oh, they might be in the party, but they are not *in* the party, if you know what I mean.

## Do we Make the Same Mistake?

And it would be one thing if it was just him who made that mistake. And I suspect that he made that mistake. But how many of us make it too? So long as any of us are obsessed with making sure that people who, for whatever reason, we think are undeserving do not get what they need, we are cutting ourselves off from the kingdom of God that Jesus was talking about. A kingdom, by the way, to be found first and above all in this world.

And that includes wanting to cut people off from having enough money to subsist in this world because they haven't worked hard enough according to our definition of what hard work is. That includes wanting to cut people off from our generosity because maybe they're not poor enough for our standards or because they have been so damaged by the system that they're no longer willing to play by its rules. Oh, we find all kinds of reasons not to want to extend God's grace to certain people. If we really understood what Jesus was saying in this parable though, we would understand that what we are really cutting ourselves off from is the celebration of life that is the kingdom of God.