

AND NOW A WORD FOR THE OTHER SON

Second Thoughts

By J. B. Leftwich, Columnist

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Shortly before my former minister left our church for a new assignment, he dusted off his Prodigal Son sermon and put his own spin on the ageless parable as related in Luke 15.

It was a pretty good sermon, as I recall it. Certainly I mean no disrespect in the use of the words, "dusted off." I think every minister has filed away a Prodigal Son sermon which he from time to time dusts off and preaches.

This is a good parable, one worth reading occasionally just to remind us of fatherly love both heavenly and earthly and to warn us about squandering our assets. Especially on fast women and chilled wine which seemed to be the case of the Prodigal who for a while had himself one heckuva good time.

Until the money ran out. Most of us, especially those in my age bracket, are not likely to exhaust our assets on the lures that attracted the Prodigal, but there are other alluring channels of waste.

Back when old Brother Lovelace used to thunder the parable from his pulpit when I was a boy, I sort of got the idea that, hey, not a bad idea being a Prodigal. You go out and do all of those naughty things suggested in the parable, and then you come home and you dad butchers a veal and welcomes you back into the family ranks with a banquet and a party.

But there is a flip side to the parable. There is the Other Son. You know, the one who stayed home, worked hard in the fields, probably took care of his old man and was a model citizen.

The Other Son commits one recorded sin. He resents all of the attention showered on the Prodigal who is just home from an extended vacation that went sour at the end.

Although I get the message intended in the parable, I think a good case can be made for the Other Son. After hearing sermons on the subject for all of these many years, the parable is forever inscribed in my mind. I may forget where I parked the car, but I'm not ever going to forget the parable of the Prodigal Son.

There is often an Other Son or Other Daughter in families. He or she is the one who takes care of his/her parents in their old age, sees to their welfare, makes the hard decisions and faces up to the problems of old parents. And more often than not, the sons or daughters who face not these problems have abundant advice and criticism for the caretakers sibling.

If I ever get the opportunity to preach a sermon, I am going to choose as my topic, The Prodigal Son. Or to be more specific, The Other Son. Just as any good preacher, I am going to rake the stay-at-home son over the coals for not welcoming home his brother and for not saying to the Prodigal: “Hey, Prod, tell me about all those beautiful harlots you courted before the money ran out,” instead of saying to his dad, “How com you killed the plump veal for this squanderer?”

Then, I am going to extol the virtues of the hard-working Other Son. I am going to laud him for his diligence and responsibility, his fidelity and his love of his parents, his industry and his loyalty.

It’s not likely I’ll get such an opportunity. No preacher is going to surrender his pulpit to me.

Especially, if he reads this column.

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