

"The Good Father (Luke 15)"
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When I learned this story as a child, my impression was that the boy made a mistake, he saw the error of his ways, he said, "you know what I'm going to go back to dad and clear everything up." It seemed like the point of the story was that God allows u turns. There was always a big emphasis on the boy and that in the end he made the right decision. It is a good story to tell our children, that when the make a mistake, they can say they are sorry and everything will be better. That is not what this story is about.

We start with verse 1 1Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

What we want to note here is that we have three kinds of people represented. First you have tax collectors and sinners the people who were outside of salvation, and outside of the community. And second you have the Pharisees and the scribes. These were the people who were in on salvation and highly respected in their community. And third you have Jesus the one who receives the rejects, the ones no one else will associate with.

Now we skip over the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin and go straight for the next parable, and if we were being consistent it would be called the lost son.

Verse 11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons.

What? There are 2 sons? Did you even know that? We focus on the younger son to such a degree that we even name this parable the prodigal son. It does start out talking about him so let's move on.

Verse 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

We have barely begun the story and he is already lost. Why? Because he has Broken his relationship with his father. I am probably in my parents' will. I am due to get some money, when? When they die. So if I ask for it now, what am I saying to them? You are worth more to me dead than alive. I actually know someone who asked his brother "what is going to happen to the family house when mom and dad die? Can I live in it? And his brother snapped him into shape and scolded him. He said how dare you even think such a thing. If and when something is coming to you, you will be notified. And that is what the older brother in this story was supposed to have done. But apparently he did not do it. In our society with entitlement mentality something is definitely lost, but Middle easterners who hear this story are shocked. They realize just how offensive this is. The younger son's behavior is Outrageous. And everyone should be horrified.

This story went wrong with the younger brother asking the question in the first place, then it went wrong with the older brother not stepping in as an intercessor between the father and the son, saying father don't listen to my silly immature little brother. He's mad he doesn't know what he's saying. Let me talk some sense into him. But now the story really goes south as the father divided the property. Does he have no shame at all? In a real situation, in the middle east this happened and the father and the son didn't talk for 5 years. And only after the rest of the family pleaded were they able to be in the same room.

But this father is no ordinary father. Jesus is defining what a father is and his definition is different from the culture's definition.

Verse 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

The word Gathered (sunago) is banking term. He liquidated his assets. He did not put an acre of land in his back pack. He had to sell it. So as soon as he is able to get rid of it on ebay, he Skips town. Why would he want to leave quickly? He's probably embarrassed. His whole village knows how greedy and thoughtless he has been, so, he's out of there.

Please note that the text says he was engaged in Expensive living. No hint of immorality. He Lives a life of luxury. And Runs through the inheritance. It is that simple.

Verse14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

Now he's in Big trouble and he hits rock bottom.

Verse 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

He attached himself to someone. He glued himself. Sometimes you see people who Wash the windows of your car and get the door for you, and then you feel obligated to pay them. That was his situation. Also Jesus is making it clear that this happened in a foreign country. The Prodigal looses his inheritance to gentiles. And in that case, The Jewish custom is to cut him off from his people. He is dead to them.

Verse 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

He wants to get a paying job. When it says no one gave him anything it means that he wants to earn enough that he will be able to put away some money at the end of each year and finally earn his way back into the family. He knows he must bring the family treasures back.

Verse 17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

Things are even worse than merely being financially stuck. Note well. I perish, I am dying, I am starving to death. And beside that he does acknowledge that his father really is generous.

So, He had no choice. It was not the case that the prodigal was really, in his heart, a good boy, and he changed his mind. He was afraid of dying. Fear is the beginning of wisdom, but only the beginning. It is good for us to acknowledge both that we are helpless and that we have a generous father.

Verse 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

Jesus knows his hearers, so he knows that they are going to recognize Pharaoh's words from Exodus 10:16 “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you.” Pharaoh was trying to work Moses to get what he wanted.

This boy is still clever and crafty. His plan is to Work the system to get what he wants. He Does not say, “I Broke my mothers heart, I Shamed my family in front of the village, I lost my father's money and I feel bad about it.” He's desperate, but he still thinks he has an ace up his sleeve. Pharaoh did not repent and neither did this kid. How do I know?

Verse 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”

I can become a skilled worker and earn my way back. He wants an honorable profession. He is not dead. I can save myself by the law, get a job save money one day, I'll say, so I blew it but here's the cash I have redeemed myself.

This is our problem we don't think that we are dead. We think that we still have a chance. We are eternal optimists. But As far as the law is concerned we have no hope of redemption. The younger brother is still trying, still arguing his case, still trying to show everyone that he really isn't so bad after all. Don't you remember, You are starving to death? And he responds, “but I'm not dead yet.”

Verse 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

From a great distance his father saw him. His father has been longing to see his son, and at the first glimpse he hikes up his robe and falls into a mad sprint right to his son. This act was Humiliating. Gentlemen do not run. Middle easterners wore robes. When was the last time you ran down the street in a choir robe? This was Self emptying love. He didn't care who saw him or what people thought, he had only one thing on his mind,

my son. The Father wants to reach the boy before the rest of the village does. The father makes peace before anyone has a chance to interfere.

This is situation identical to Genesis 33:4 Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And when Jacob was greeted this way he exclaimed that due to the great forgiveness of Esau he said to his brother, "to see your face is to see the face of God."

This is not about a boy who was lost and then found his way home. This is about a boy who was lost and was found by his father and brought home. This is Preemptive grace. Before he reached home, before he had even spoken a word, he had already been accepted by his father. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them.

Verse 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

There will be no justification here. So before the son could get out another word, the father declares that the boy has been restored.

Verse 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

The father puts a robe on him and arrays him in all of the finest wares. Just like Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness. Nothing but the best for my son. And that is what God has done for you, As Paul says you who have been baptized are clothed in Christ.

Verse 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

Even in this story there is a sacrifice, someone has to die, and then there is a celebration. This is the zenith of feasting. This is the meal of meals. The father pulls out all the stops and puts on a black tie affair.

Verse 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

Note well there were two parables before this one. Did the sheep find its way back to the shepherd? Did the coin find its way back to the woman? And in this verse, These are Passive verbs. The father is telling us, my son was dead and I brought him back to life, he was lost, and I found him. His father's suffering brings him to life.

Verse 25 “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

Verse 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

Verse 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’

For “safe and sound” Luke wrote the word `ugaiino, this is where we get the word hygiene. Now it is true that this word means that he was in a state of good health. Our records show that all of your shots are up to date and you passed our physical exam. No this goes much deeper, 1Timothy6:3, Paul describes the words of our Lord Jesus Christ as `ugaiino, free from error, to be correct. The lost son was formerly wrong and his relationship was broken but now he was free from error, he was made correct reconciled. Genesis 43:27 we see that `ugaiino is interchangeable with the word shalom, peace. So, The son was now was at peace with his father. With this story Jesus is responding to the accusation of the Pharisees that he Receives sinners, no it is much worse than that, I am at peace with them.

Again, This is Not a health report. The servant explains that The party is a celebration of the shalom, the peace, that his father’s love has accomplished.

This was crushing news to the older brother. He wants to demand that his brother work to earn his status, but too late, the reconciliation has already taken place.

Verse 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,

Here his father throws a great party and the older son gives a great insult by refusing to go in. at least the younger son insulted him privately but this is Outrageous. the older son now brings public Dishonor to the father.

Again, any Father with even an ounce of self respect would have locked up the older son to deal with him later. But here the father is pleading with him.

Verse 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

Look! That’s his response. Look! He leaves out the honor, he does not even say father. And he sees himself as a servant. I served you. And Never disobeyed? Really? What about honor your father and mother? He broke the 4th commandment.

Verse 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’

He disowns his brother by saying, this Son of yours. And then he bears false witness against his brother. The text tells us about the younger son's Expensive living, but there is no hint of any immorality. This is a false accusation. He Publicly disgraces his brother. He broke the 8th commandment.

Verse 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

The father uses a tender word here. He calls his son, "child". He is drawing his son near, and the father makes a declaration to the son. All that I have is yours. Jesus is using this to tell us what kind of heavenly father we have. We have a father who gives us everything. he finds us, he saves us, he forgives us, he includes us, so how can anyone be excluded? As we read earlier, the older brother refused to go in to the party. And when you ask Why do people go to hell? The answer is the same. Preferring to be angry that their brother is getting forgiveness that he does not deserve, They refuse the forgiveness that has been won for them. This is One sided grace. God comes singlehandedly to save. We may reject, but to make it ours is what he has already done.

Here's the recap

Both sons break the relationship with their father

Both sons are out in the field

Both sons are sought out by the father.

Both sons are given costly love

Both sons define their relationship as servant

Both sons are given everything

Let us rename all three parables to put the emphasis where it belongs. The good shepherd, the good woman and to be consistent The Good Father.

Verse 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

Again the father reiterates that because of my one-sided outrageous forgiveness for the lost, parties must take place. It is only when you see how much you need it that you won't worry about others getting it for free. You were lost you have been found. You were dead but now you have been made alive. Your father has thrown a party because he has you back safe and sound. Your father has prepared a feast for you. Here, today in the bread and the wine, he declares all that he has is yours.

My last word to you. Enjoy the party!