

Father's Day 2024
Luke 15:11-32
“The Greatest Father”

Introduction

For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received The Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out “Abba, Father!” **Romans 8:14-15**

When my granddaughter Mia was just a little thing (around 3 or 4), she used to sit on my lap and we'd tell each other stories. She would make up tall tales about princesses being rescued from bears and stuff like that. And I would do my best to come up with different stories on the fly. And while it was great fun for us, let's just say, no one has ever offered to publish any of our “creative works!” I'm just saying that it takes a lot of effort (and brains) to make up a story on the fly that is worth writing down for posterity.

Now, think about that for a moment and imagine how vast and incredible is the mind of Christ. For not only did He make up several stories *on the fly*, as it were, but each of them are amazingly deep in their context. You can study any one of Christ's parables for weeks and months and continue to find nuance after nuance. They are that profound. My point is... only God would have the mental capacity to do such a thing! Famous writers and poets agonize over every line of their works, and even then very few ever receive public acclaim. But every recorded word that Christ has spoken has endured for over two thousand years.

Which brings me to possibly the most famous of all the parables. The story of *The Prodigal Son*. It has become one of the most repeated stories in all of literature. Many other stories and songs have been written using it as a backdrop. And it, like all Jesus' stories, was made up on the spur of the moment in response to a careless comment by the Pharisees.

“All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to Him. And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” **Luke 15:1-2**

It was in response to this foolish statement that Jesus responded with not one, but three short stories! The first was about a man who had one hundred sheep and went searching for a single lamb that had gone missing, leaving the ninety-nine behind. The second story was about a woman who had ten silver coins and lost one. In her desperate search to find it, she basically tore her whole house apart. And finally the third story was about a wasteful son who wandered away from his father and wasted his money and his life in pursuit of worldly pleasures. This incredibly rich story has come to be known as “*The Prodigal Son*”. And it is one of the most powerful stories ever told. And it was made up by Christ on the fly!

The word “prodigal” has often been mistaken to mean “a wanderer”, but it actually does not mean that at all. It is an outdated old English term meaning “*wasteful*”. And it perfectly describes anyone who is enamored with the fleeting pleasures of this life and is not rich toward God. The story has three main characters: 1) A Father who is amazingly loving and compassionate. 2) A younger son who thinks that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, and 3) A spiteful, unforgiving, older brother who is even more lost on the back porch of his Father's house than his wandering younger sibling.

We all know the story. But do we all completely comprehend the subtle nuances that can only be understood within the context of the society in which it is set? Probably not. So today I would like to share with you the story of *The Prodigal Son*, which could just as easily have been called, the story of “*The Godless and Unforgiving Brother*”. It is meant to be a reminder to us all of just how incredible and loving our Heavenly Father is, and how we should strive to be more like Him in all that we say and do. So let us examine for ourselves on this *Father's Day* what the Ultimate Father is like, as we see, *The Father's Fortune*, *The Father's Forgiveness*, and *The Father's Feast*. And hopefully, we will be able to *taste* this amazing story once more... for the first time.

The Father's Fortune (vs. 11-16)

He also said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything. **Luke 11:11-16**

The Pharisees would have been completely shocked at the behavior of this younger son in Jesus' story. In order to completely understand why, we must do a bit of cultural study. It was the custom of the Jewish people in those days to provide an inheritance for their sons. The older son was entitled to a "double portion" of his father's estate as the right of the firstborn. Since the father in this story only had two sons, then the older brother would inherit two thirds of his estate, while the younger sibling would get the remaining third. This estate would have passed on to the sons only upon the father's death, for it was the responsibility of the sons to remain close and to look after their father in his old age. As long as he lived, the family fortune belonged solely to him.

For the younger son to go to his father and ask for his inheritance in advance would have been a terrible disgrace. For he was in essence saying to his father, "I cannot wait for you to die, so I want my money now!" This would have been despicable in a society that was committed to the Ten Commandments, and to despise one's father enough to say such a thing was a violation of the fifth commandment which states:

Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that The LORD your God is giving to you. **Exodus 20:12**

To make such a request of his father while he was still living would, therefore, be a virtually unforgivable transgression in the eyes of the Pharisees.

As Christ continued his parable, the religious leaders would have been even more surprised that the father would agree to such a callous request. What Jewish father would willingly give up a third of his estate while he was still living? This would have been unthinkable to the Pharisees, who would have expected the father to banish the son and leave him alone and penniless. But what an incredible image of how the sinner disregards our Heavenly Father.

For you see, everything that we have, our very life itself has been granted to us from the abundance of our Heavenly Father's storehouse of wealth. We would not survive for a moment apart from His great generosity. And yet, when we choose to take the very life that He has given us and squander it to live solely for our own selfish pleasure, we too are in essence saying that we wished God was dead so we could live as we please. This is what the disease of "self-love" is really all about, the desire to live apart from God and to have our own way.

Not only did the younger son demand his share of the inheritance, but he immediately liquidated it into cash. For you see, in that society there would have been livestock and other material assets involved in the estate. There was not a pile of cash laying around for the young man to inherit. This is what the Greek means when it says he "*gathered together*" all he had. For he would have had to sell all that the father gave him, more than likely at a discount in order to have the spending money that he desired. He despised all that his father had worked a lifetime to achieve and quickly dispatched with all of it in order to get as far away from his father as he could. The Pharisees must have been shocked to hear of such reckless abandon.

And not only did he liquidate his father's assets, but he immediately squandered the wealth in what Christ referred to as "foolish living". In short, he blew his father's life savings on worldly pursuits and fleshly pleasures. And I am quite certain that while he was doing this he had an abundance of so-called

friends that were only too happy to share in his indulgences. But as many in this life have learned the hard way, when the money is all gone, then so are the friends.

So, when hard times came in the form of a famine in the land, there was no money left by which to survive. Rather than going home, where people cared about him, he *“attached himself”* (literal Greek translation) to a pagan pig farmer. To lower oneself to care for such unclean animals would have been the ultimate degradation for a Jewish person. But that is exactly what sin does to us, it takes us to the lowest place it can find and leaves us there. Rather than turn from our wicked ways, we often attach ourselves to others who have no regard for God. And the end result is always the same... rock bottom.

The reckless young man began to starve. He longed to eat the pods (more than likely carob pods) that the pigs were eating. Carob pods are pea shaped pods that grow on the Carob tree. They turn black when they are ripened and are considered to be the last defense for human consumption in times of famine. The seeds can be ground into a powder that is a poor substitute for cocoa in order to make a *poor man’s* hot chocolate. But more often than not, they are utilized to feed livestock. It stands to reason that in hard times, when people are not able to eat well, that the pigs would be doing far worse! What a horrible place to find oneself when hard times come, penniless and eating with the pigs. What a picture The LORD has painted of the utter devastation of the sinful life!

The Father’s Forgiveness (vs. 17-21)

When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.”’ So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’ **Luke 11:17-21**

When the young man finally woke up, so to speak, he began to realize just how good he had it at his father’s place. So he began trying to figure out a way to get back home. He knew what he had done was probably unforgivable at this point, but he at least hoped after a time his father might consider taking him on as a hired hand or possibly even as slave. Anything would be better than living with the pigs. So he began to make his way back home.

The father saw him coming *“a long way off”*, which suggest two things; first, he had been watching for his son’s return, and second, it was daytime when the boy approached. So the father did the unthinkable, he ran to meet him. In this particular culture, a distinguished man running was considered a disgrace. For in order to run, a man must gird up his robe and expose his bare legs. Such an act was demeaning and would have been frowned upon by the whole community, but the father didn’t care. He was willing to humble himself because of his great love for his wayward child. (What a picture of the cross of Jesus Christ!)

Because this return happened during the daytime, the village would have been bustling with activity, so all the people who lived there would see this young man returning home covered in the filth of the hog pen. The disgrace he had brought to his family and village would have been considered a stoning offense. So the father ran to his son and embraced him, hugging and kissing him in spite of his filthy clothing, wrapping his arms around him tightly and basically saying to everyone there, “If you want to get to him, then you’ll have to go through me!” What a stunning visual of our Heavenly Father’s love for us. For you see, He was willing to die, so that we might live. At the cross Jesus took our death, the death that we so readily deserved, and embraced us as the filth of our sins hung on us like a garment. Such is The Father’s love and forgiveness for us His wayward children. For Our God forgives even the blackest of sin for the wayward one who will but return home.

The son had his speech all prepared. He knew he didn't deserve to be called a son, but just maybe he could become a hired hand. The father didn't even let him finish the speech. He would hear nothing of the sort. The boy was fully restored as a son. This is the same forgiveness that our God will offer to any who will come to Jesus in repentance humbly submit ourselves to His service. We are not slaves. We are adopted as sons! No matter how far away you have strayed from The Father, know this; He stands ready to forgive you with open arms and to wash away the stains of the hog pen.

“Come let us settle this,” says The LORD. “Though your sins are scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land.” **Isaiah 1:18-19**

The Father's Feast (vs. 22-32)

“But the father told his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.

“Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. ‘Your brother is here,’ he told him, ‘and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’

“‘Son,’ he said to him, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” **Luke 11:22-32**

Having no desire to accept his son on a “lesser status”, the father command his servants to bring out the “best robe” and put it on him. The young man was no doubt washed clean from the filth of the hog pen and clothed in not one of the best robes, but the “best” robe. Some scholars say that this is a reference to the special robe a wealthy father might wear to official functions such as a son's wedding etc. Whatever it was, the robe was the best the father owned.

When we repent of our sin and receive Christ as Savior, God's Word tells us that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, so that we may stand spotless before the throne of God (**Galatians 3:27**). And that, my friends, is as fine a “robe” as anyone could ever hope to have! To be in Christ is to be forgiven and restored to our heavenly father as a son. The Father also commanded that shoes and a ring be given to the returning son. Sons wore shoes, while slaves went barefoot. Once again affirming a full restoration.

The young man was also given a ring, which represented the signet ring or family seal worn by the father. This meant that the son would now be given full authority to conduct business on behalf of his family, for he wore on his finger his father's own signet ring. What a glorious picture of God's amazing grace. Sinners aren't just partially accepted, but rather fully restored. There will be no second class Christians in heaven, only sons and daughters!

Finally, the father declared an official day of feasting to celebrate his lost son's resurrection from death unto life again. Jesus wanted us to understand that God celebrates when a lost soul comes to Him for forgiveness. *The Bible* also speaks of a great banquet, called "The Marriage Supper of The Lamb" that will occur when all God's children are welcomed home to their eternal reward (**Revelation 19:9**). What a great feast our Father will throw for us in the kingdom of God.

Now, you would think that everyone would have been thrilled that the son had returned and brought such joy to his father, but unfortunately, the older son was incensed. So much so that he refused to even go inside to join in the festivities. Once again the father humbled himself in order to plead with the older boy. But the truth of his heart was exposed. For this young man was as estranged from his father as the younger son had ever been.

He spoke of serving his father as "slavery", rather than an act of devotion. He despised the younger man calling him "*this son of yours*", rather than a brother. He claimed to have faithfully kept all the father's commands, thus exposing his own self-righteous image of himself. For you see, those who are legalistic truly believe that they are pleasing to God because they are so good. They are unable to see that they too have fallen short of God's glory. And one thing we can all learn from legalism— It despises grace. Since the legalist feels like they are good enough to earn God's favor they frown upon those they deem less deserving who receive God's mercy and grace. And this older sibling proved once and for all that he despised his father far more than the younger brother ever had.

Jesus left the story unfinished. It was a cliffhanger, so to speak, leaving the hearer to wonder if the older son ever accepted his father's invitation to join the feast. Some *Bible* scholars believe that after Jesus' abrupt ending to the story, He simply walked away, leaving the Pharisees to reflect on the warning. We know from the *Scriptures* that these self-righteous religious leaders, who despised Jesus for His love of sinners (portrayed by the older brother in this story), rejected the grace offered them by God and instead crucified the very one Who had come to save them. For them, the great feast remained unattended.

So, there is the story of the *Prodigal Son* or *The Lost Older Brother* depending upon your chosen emphasis. But for those of us who are fathers ourselves, the name of this story could very well be called, *The Perfect Father*. For our Heavenly Father has lavishly bestowed upon us His *Fortune*, we are co-heirs with Christ (**Romans 8:16**); His *Forgiveness*, for there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (**Romans 8:1**); and finally, His *Feast*, for we shall all attend the grand banquet in heaven known as the marriage supper of The Lamb (**Revelation 19:9**). Our Father is truly a good, good Father!

Have a wonderful and joyous day on this our "*Father's Day*."
And let all the sons (and daughters) say... **TRUTH!!!**