

## PARABLES: THE PRODIGAL SONS pt. 2

The intent of the parable is not lost on the Pharisees who were the primary audience for the parable. We've heard it for 2000 years and we're used to hearing the story and thinking that the crowd must have been overwhelmed by the love and grace of God. The narrative ends on a down note as the older son is left outside the party. The Pharisees get the message, and they are not pleased. They won't be going home to tell this parable to their hearers in the synagogues.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where the murmuring / grumbling of the religious elite will reach its crescendo with the cries of "Crucify Him."

22But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27And 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.' 28But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him.

29But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.' "

### REVIEW:

Jesus welcomed and even ATE with sinners, the outcast. For his opponents, that was simply too far. SO, HE TELLS THEM 3 PARABLES – The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost Sons.

### PRODIGAL SONS v. 11 ff

Jesus opens by presenting the three main characters: The father and TWO SONS.

#### Who does the YOUNGER SON REPRESENT?

-Rebellious humanity which wants his father i.e. God to die.

#### The Face-Saving Plan is short circuited by the kiss of the father.

The son never got to get to the negotiation stage with the father because he was overwhelmed by love and forgiveness. ARE YOU?

Is our Christian life is characterized by face-saving negotiation or by a grateful response to the amazing grace of God?

This parable gives us an insight into repentance...

Repentance truly happens when we see the free forgiveness of God. It's not going to God with an attitude of "Let's Make A Deal."

JESUS ALREADY MADE THE DEAL.

Repentance is turning from sin to Christ, or in this case, your Father who is there to welcome you back home. It is agreeing with God that we've sinned and agreeing with God that our sin is covered by Christ alone. It is NOT turning from sin to "That was so stupid. How could I do that? That's not the real me" or "I'll try

harder to do better” or “Give me a second chance” or “What can I do to make up for it, Lord?”

**THE OLDER SON—(Tim Keller – The Prodigal God**

WHO does he represent??? The Pharisees

We don't know as much about him at the beginning, but he is the focus at the end.

With the older son, the father still retained some say so in the disposition of the resources – “All that is mine is yours” i.e. possession. Yet the father initiates the disposition - “Let's kill the fatted calf and have a party.”

WHOSE CALF WAS THAT? –It would belong to the older son at some point. All resources spent on the party are resources that WOULD HAVE belonged to the Older brother at some point.

What did he know and when did he know it?

He certainly knew the whole story, and he probably knew it from the beginning.

This would have been a very hard thing to keep secret in a village, in a house with servants and walls that were hardly soundproof.

Chances are, most people in the village knew pretty soon as well, and once the younger brother has his estate sale, all doubt is removed.

Ex: While the actions of the younger son were shameful in that culture, he did nothing illegal, but you can bet that he was the talk of the town for a while.

**The older brother did not act as a mediator. It would have been his responsibility to seek out the younger brother to bring reconciliation.** In an honor/ shame culture the two parties in a quarrel would use a mediator so that neither person would lose face. **The goal of the mediator is to negotiate a 'win/win' for both sides. In that culture, the mediator would be someone with close ties to both parties – THE OLDER BROTHER would be the obvious choice.**

The silence and passivity of the older brother indicates some sort of problem with the younger brother AND WITH THE FATHER ..v. 25-32

**In the parable of the prodigal 'SON', BOTH SONS ARE ALIENATED FROM THE FATHER – one by his unrighteousness, the other by his SELF-RighteousNESS.**

In a culture where the oldest son is given a place of great honor and responsibility, it is easy for him to become insufferably arrogant, OR he can bring honor to the family.

EX: “the closest thing to God on earth is a good big brother.”

It would have been the place of the older son to intercede and seek the younger to stay so as to not bring heartache to his father and mother. If the younger is set on leaving, then the older would tell him that their prayers are with him and invoke God's protection. (p. 29 Bailey epub)

\*\*The Pharisees, the older brothers, should have been the ones setting an example of humility and obedience to God, but they were self-righteous. They were hypocrites and sons of their father the devil, according to Jesus. As a result, the people were downcast like sheep without a shepherd.

**The older brother, who feels so superior to the prodigal son, also brings shame on the father by refusing to go into the banquet. He too is motivated by self-interest, not by love for the father.**

He asks a servant, “What's going on here”? and learns that there is a party for the younger brother who has returned and has been “received safe and sound.”

BAILEY p. 51 The Greek word for 'safe and sound' is the word from which we get “hygiene” = clean,

uncorrupt. In the Greek version of the OT, when that word is used, it used to translate “shalom”, which means “health, peace, and a sense of reconciliation.”

i.e. by the time the Older brother shows up, the father and younger son are reconciled. He didn't have the chance to go in and say, “Make this young fool pay a price for what he's done. He needs to reimburse all that he's lost before he can come back to this house.”

So, the older son is angry and refuses to go into the party. This was a HUGE SOCIAL INSULT to the father and the guests. It would be the custom for the oldest son to help greet and serve the guests as he engaged them in conversation.

He may have felt that the father had disgraced himself by receiving the prodigal brother without a place for restitution and reconciliation. The offending brother has not paid a price for his sinful foolish behavior. That sort of grace towards the sinner is unacceptable to some – i.e. the primary audience – Pharisees.

The younger son was miserable because he fell prey to his own foolish and sinful desires – God turned him over.

The older son was miserable because he believed his own press reports, and he lived on the treadmill of performance. **He saw himself as having a perfect record of obedience, as a servant/ “slave”. In his mind, he was the one who was ‘hygienic and uncorrupt.’**

**His self-righteousness made him so miserable that he couldn't even rejoice with his father when the brother came home.**

Ex: Think Javert in Les Miserable

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/lesmiserablescast/javertssuicide.html>

He takes his own life rather than live in the debt of a thief.

**“I am the law and the law is not mocked; I'll spit his pity right back in his face.”**

That is what he did. He basically spat in his father's face.

He is wrapped up in his pride, envy, bitterness, resentment, self-satisfaction and self-righteousness. Yet he can only see the sins of the younger brother and the weakness of the father. He sees his own actions as a righteous search for honor. - BAILEY

It is also a public insult for the older son to refuse to greet the guests. That was expected of male members of the family, even if they don't stay for the event.

We can easily guess that the insult by the son became known to those at the feast. This public insult would demand some sort of action by the father. Everyone at the party would be watching to see what he would do. They would assume that the older son would be punished or ignored until the guests were gone. (BAILEY)

Ex: GWTW when Scarlett shows up at Miss Melanie's for Ashley's birthday party after word was out that Scarlett and Ashley were seen together. Rhett makes Scarlett wear a red dress for the symbolism. Scarlett walks in and all eyes are on Melanie. HOW DOES SHE RESPOND – with an elegant grace.

She embraces her and says, “That's a lovely dress Scarlett. Would you be an angel and help me receive my guests. Ashley, aren't you going to get OUR Scarlett a glass of punch.”

#### **WHAT DOES THE FATHER DO?**

**Again, the father humbles himself and endures shame as he goes out to try to bring reconciliation by entreating with his son to enter the party.**

He is calling the son to come alongside of him to the party. This is different word in the “calling” family of words from the older son “calling one of the servants.” There the idea is to “summon”, like a master would summon a servant. But the father calls the older son to be beside him/ alongside of him in receiving the brother. But the older son's goal is to get and preserve what he can from the father, not share a relationship

of reconciliation with his father or brother.

He is ALSO TRANSACTIONAL with the father..."I've worked for you and you never gave me..."

NOTE: The father is not only looking for reconciliation with the younger son; he is also seeking reconciliation between the brothers.

\*\* God not only reconciles us to Himself in Christ, but He provides what is needed for those who are in his family to be reconciled with each other.

Col 3 : 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

\*\* APPLY:

What makes this parable so powerful is that it addresses us no matter where we are because the human condition is such that we can be both brothers within minutes of each other. Both brothers are 'lost' - one by his desire to "do it his own way", the other by his mistrust of the father's heart.

EX: Today's young prodigal lives life his way and ends up finding that what he thought he wanted didn't really bring fulfillment. Maybe his life tanks and he is in despair, or he/she succeeds, and life is still empty. How many successful people have climbed the ladder of success only to find it leaning against the wrong building? How many have 'had it all' and said, "is this all there is?"

Imagine that a young prodigal finds him/herself lost in life and the message of Jesus brings new life. He repents of his obvious sin and things change, Growth takes place, and ironically, he/she slowly begins to think and sound like an older brother - "I'm obeying so well; I deserve the fatted calf." If one is not careful, a repentant younger brother can become a Pharisee like OLDER brother. (default mode of the heart)

THAT IS A COMMON OCCURANCE in the faith journey. For the unrighteous or the self-righteous, repentance is the door to change.

The parable gives no resolution with the older brother - his audience of Pharisees - because the older brother problem is perhaps harder to solve. His sin is harder to see because it isn't so much in external behavior but in an attitude of the heart. He must repent of trusting in his own righteousness. He is lost because of his "goodness." He is using his obedience to put the father into his debt - "I've worked for you, so you owe me a party."

Ex: Do we do the same with God? I've been obeying, so you owe it to me to work things out the way I WANT THEM.

Have you heard people say, "I've tried Christianity and God, and it didn't work."

What they mean is, "I stopped my bad ways; I was religious and when I wanted something, and God didn't give it to me."

They had a religious transactional approach to God, not a relationship of a dependent sinner in need of a savior. They repented from their bad sin, but not of their own righteousness. They tried to use it to manipulate God.

Ex: a transactional approach is what we have when we are buying a car or a house. There's a negotiation and an agreement that both parties accept.

The Christian faith is a relationship based on a transaction that Christ has accomplished for us. WE HAVE BEEN BOUGHT WITH A PRICE - the precious blood of Jesus.

A man once said to me...“ I struggle with unrighteousness and My wife struggles with self-righteousness. My unrighteousness is because I’m not walking by faith and am not satisfied with the righteousness of Christ for me. Her self-righteousness is a form of unrighteousness and it is because she doesn’t rest by faith in the righteousness of Christ for her.

Either way it is an issue of FAITH IN THE Righteousness OF Christ ALONE.

The OLDER BROTHER prayer AND THE younger brother face-saving plan

Lord, please restore to us the comfort of merit and demerit. Show us that there is at least something we can do, that we can even in a small way keep some small earning power in our own hands. Tell us that in spite of all our nights of losing there will be at least one redeeming card of our own. Lord, let your servants depart in the peace of their proper responsibility. If it is not too much to ask, Lord, send us to bed with a few shreds of self-respect upon which we can congratulate ourselves. But whatever you do, do not tell us about grace. Give us something to do, anything, but spare us the indignity of this indiscriminate acceptance.

Robert Farrar Capon, *Between Noon and Three*

The prodigal knew the father was gracious but still tried a “Face-Saving Plan”. The older brother never really knew the heart of the father because he was oriented by an “Earning Favor” plan.

We all tend to alternate between the two in our own lives.

### THERE IS GRACE FOR THE OLDER BROTHER AS WELL

What we all struggle with is the biblical truth that God gives us a place in the family, not a job in the factory. As beloved children, God never lets us go. He never kicks us out. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

JESUS IS THE TRUE OLDER BROTHER who mediates between God and man. He steps in and takes the “L” so that we get the “W”.

Our salvation is secured by Jesus facing humiliation and taking our shame on the cross.

The costly love of Christ is designed for older and younger brothers and sisters.

### COME TO THE TABLE

The TABLE before us is an invitation to the celebration that God has prepared for us. We don’t deserve it; we can’t earn it, BUT we can CELEBRATE IT AND BE FEED BY IT, BUT FAITH.

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