

PARABLE: THE FATHER & 2 SONS (LUKE 15)

(The Forgiving Father, epitome of grace unsurpassed)

In September 2019 Vine, I shared the parable's message through [the younger son](#).

In November 2019 Vine, I shared the parable's message through [the elder son](#).

Now, let me share the parable's message through the father.



The father is an epitome of grace unsurpassed by anybody. While “The Prodigal Son” description often stands out in any discussion of the parable, it is significant to note that the narratives about the prodigal and his brother are there primarily serving to flesh out the immense loving character of the father who would never disown his child.

(Focus: The Father!)

If ever the younger son were to be “disowned”, it would be a case of being disowned from the father by the act of the son himself rather than being disowned by the father to be a castaway.

All children of God are like siblings to one another. Yet, the sibling bond, though warm and benevolent in cases, does see occasions of being frayed whereby one may find brothers/sisters snubbing one another in fellowship despite mouthfuls of proclamations about “loving one another as Christ loves us”. The reaction of the elder brother to his repentant younger brother throws into sharp relief how the father is not like his children. The

father loves both the elder son and the younger son, but the two brothers do not have the same kind of love between them – the love that surpasses all.

The elder son, thinking of his own “righteousness”, disdained his younger brother. The father thought differently, and warmly received back the prodigal son who was ascribed worthiness despite his contemptibility in his brother’s eyes.

How many of us are like the elder son, thinking highly of ourselves and casting aside (in our hearts, if not openly) any of our brothers or sisters whom we think are less deserving of our association in fellowship?

Rom. 3:22 tells us that all righteousness from God comes through faith to all who believe. The righteousness of the prodigal son comes through his faith in his father, with his belief that his father would receive him back.

Children of God who turn away from the Father to indulge in their waywardness should know in their hearts that they are in whatever sorry predicaments because they have rejected the Father and not because the Father has rejected them. It is their own choice, not the Father’s desire, for them to suffer in consequence of their sin. The Father’s desire is for them to come back home whereby they would be forgiven.

Meanwhile, if they do think that “since my Father is forever ready to receive me back; therefore it is fine for me to continue having my freedom for fun,” they should know that the price of suffering to pay is great – a suffering that could be grave to life – until such time that they realise their folly and humbly accept that obedient faith in the Father is the only recourse for deliverance into the real joy of life redeemed from death’s calling.

In the parable, the father's reception of the younger son was unequivocal, but it could only come to pass upon the prodigal taking the step to come to the father. The father was all the time waiting to forgive the younger son, not counting his trespasses against him, if only the son would repent and return. Similarly, "through the Messiah, God was reconciling the world to himself by not counting their sins against them. He has committed his message of reconciliation to us." (2 Cor. 5:19)

How often do children of God fail to understand the Father correctly? The once lost and now repentant son had conceived these thoughts: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." (v. 19)

The prodigal son underestimated his potential to be worthy again in the Father's sight upon his repentance. In contrast to the prodigal son's misunderstanding, the father made him the centre of his affection instead of making him a slave.

If the father in the parable takes the idea of the elder son to reject the younger son, then it would point toward the fact that the elder son is also subject to the same family rule of "unforgiveness" should he one day face some equally grim transgression. Remarkably, the father in the parable points to a very different "family"; i.e., God's Kingdom; where grace and mercy rule over all.

The church is a community with shared experiences of triumphs and defeats in a constant struggle against temptations. There is pain sustained through the sin of disobedience, and pain relieved through a return to faith in Christ who is One with the Father (John 10:30) whereby the forgiven sinner is no longer a slave but God's child; and being God's child, the Father has also made him an heir. (Gal. 4:7)

The parable's message of the Father's grace and mercy gives sinners hope and the encouragement to desist from their rebellion – the future is bright only with their homecoming to be united with the Father by faith. It is liberating to those who feel condemned by self-righteous individuals they know (like the "elder brother" or the "Pharisees" in the church community).

It is apt for our reflection the "Three Kinds of Men"¹ that C. S. Lewis mentioned in a short essay:

1st:

"those who live simply for their own sake and pleasure ..."

[Immoral, like the prodigal son before his repentance]

2nd:

"those who acknowledge some other claim upon them...and honestly try to pursue their own interests no further than this claim will allow ... Their life is divided, like a soldier's or a schoolboy's life, into time 'on parade' and 'off parade,' 'in school' and 'out of school'."

[Like the elder son, who lives by the claim of his own morality – dutifully dividing his time between going to work in the field and going off work – i.e., living religiously by surrendering to a self-imposed 'law', also like the Pharisees.]

3rd:

"those who can say like St. Paul that for them 'to live is Christ.' ... The old egoistic will has been turned around, reconditioned, and made into a new thing. The will of Christ no longer limits theirs; it is theirs. All their time, in belonging to Him, belongs also to them, for they are His."

¹ <https://2thesource.wordpress.com/2013/06/13/three-kinds-of-men-c-s-lewis/>

[Like the repented prodigal son who turned around from his egoistic past and instead wrapped himself in the will of the father.]

In the parable, the father is the character that appears from the first line (v. 11) through the last (v. 32) and mentioned in all the narratives concerning the two sons. He is the most outstanding character worthy of praise; and so is God, our Father, that the parable alludes to.

“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” – Micah 7:18-19.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:36 –

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (NIV)

“You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.” (NLT)

As we study the manners of the prodigal son, his elder brother and their father in the famous parable, it is good not to neglect placing the father at the centre of our attention.

May our meditation lead us to a deeper appreciation of Abba, our Father of mercy (compassion) as the Spirit we received brought about our adoption to sonship, to have mercy (compassion) just as the Father is merciful (compassionate).

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