

## The Merciful Father

Would you turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Luke 15... And we are going to be looking today, at the ever so famous parable of the Prodigal Son...

Beginning at v. 1 it reads.....

(read verse 1-2)

Before we even read the parable of the prodigal son, we need to understand that ALL of Luke 15 is Jesus' response to the accusations that the Pharisees are making here...in verse 1-2. The Pharisees and the scribes are GRUMBLING and ACCUSING Jesus.. OF RECEIVING sinners and EATING with them...

This word RECEIVE... Its a strong word in the Greek.. Its not a passive receiving like how you would receive a handshake... It means to eagerly await or look forward to.... Luke uses this same word in Luke 2 to describe how Simeon was "eagerly awaiting" the consolation of Israel.. and how Anna the prophetess ... was "eagerly awaiting" the redemption of Israel. And in Luke 12:36 - Jesus says, Be like men who are "eagerly awaiting" the return of the master from the wedding feast.

SO. In other words - When it says here that Jesus is RECEIVING sinners... it means that He is looking for them and eagerly awaiting their coming. He has his eye out for them. As we will soon read, this is reflected in the actions of the father in the parable....

And the Pharisees.. well.. they are grumbling...

Jesus is hanging out with the wrong crowd.. if He is truly our Messiah.. He shouldn't be seeking out sinners and eating with them...

And JESUS, in RESPONSE to this resentful attitude, tells, not one.. not 2.. but 3 PARABLES... To MAKE AN EMPHATIC POINT....

NAMELY, THE HEART OF GOD IS REJOICES when a sinner REPENTS! You have got it ALL WRONG! You are GRUMBLING but GOD IS REJOICING!

In verses 3–7, Jesus compares His receiving sinners to a shepherd who finds a lost sheep and celebrates with all his friends.

In verses 8–10, He compares receiving sinners to a woman who finds a lost coin and celebrates with all her friends.

In both cases... JESUS leaves no room for the imagination... . He spells it out for us... The lost sheep and the lost coin represent lost sinners, and being found represents repentance, and that celebration is what God and all the angels are doing in heaven...

Moreover, in verses 11 and following... Jesus gives a third answer... BUT this time, He adds a twist... Because the story does not just simply end with celebration...

So why don't we read... 15:11-ff... together...

Verse 24: "'This son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry."

BUT the story does not end here...

How wonderful would it be if it did end here...

You see, the prodigal had done something unspeakable... in that culture - to ask for one's inheritance was like telling your parents you wanted them dead. And it says that he squandered his wealth... most likely with prostitutes...

So here is a man.. who had betrayed his father... DISHONoured him... SQUANDERED His family's estate on partying it up with prostitutes.. drinking... drugs... and when he HAS NOTHING LEFT. He dares to go back home - reasoning that he won't be accepted as a son again, he goes with the plan of begging to become a servant... under His Father...

BUT the Father...

He sees his son from a FAR way off - there it is again... EAGERLY WAITING... and when He spots the figure of his son on the horizon... HE runs out to greet him... RECEIVES HIM... EMBRACES him.. and before his son can even beg to be accepted into the household as a slave... the father lavishes him with LOVE... washes him up... dresses him in clean clothes... and kills the fattened calf to celebrate the return of his lost SON.

Now... A FATTENED CALF - would have been enough to FEED at least 800 people!!! AND ! We must remember ... this is a CALF... in other words... VEAL! Veal is expensive NOW and it was expensive then! So the father in this story is pulling out all the stops here... He wants his entire household and the people in his village TO COME AND celebrate with him....

And celebrate they did! All the people got together and started singing and dancing .... and eating!

But there is someone left on the outside...

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

Immediately, we have to note - HOW DILIGENT the elder son is! HE is IN THE FIELDS! He was WORKING HARD...And after a long day... he begins to make his way back home.. when he hears the sounds of PARTYING... What's going on ... My father's birthday is not coming up for another 2 months! So he calls one of the servants over and asks what the occasion is... And the servant replies.. in verse 27... Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound....

But... verse 28...BUT... the elder son was ANGRY... and refused to go in... Just let that sink in..

The elder son was ANGRY and refused to go in....

Before we move on in the story... let me grab your attention by saying this: the remainder of the sermon is going to be EXTREMELY relevant to the of us who have grown up in the church.. which is probably 90% of you...

This for those of you who come to church and always feel like the message is for somebody else..

This part of the sermon is for people who are like you and me... I imagine that most of the people in this room.. even if they were to wander from God.. It wouldn't BE that OUTWARDLY noticeable.. we wouldn't do drugs.. we wouldn't run away from home.... we wouldn't squander our parents money with

prostitutes... why? because we ARE NICE people... that grew up in church. So no.. we probably can't relate to the prodigal as much... But we can relate with the elder son...

So pay very close attention to what transpires between the father and the elder son...

verse 28... His father came out and entreated him.... to come inside.... Just as how Jesus is EARNESTLY waiting for prodigals to RETURN... The father here is ENTREATING... or EAGERLY ASKING the elder son... and in extension the Pharisees... to come inside... But the elder son would have none of it. LOOK! At all these many years I have SERVED YOU... and I have always OBEYED YOU.... Even now, I am returning from a hard days WORK in your FIELDS.... AND YET you NEVER once threw a party for me... But when this SON of yours... comes back home... after devouring your property with prostitutes... you just kill the fattened calf for him... as if nothing happened... WHAT did HE EVER do to deserve SUCH KINDNESS!

And the father replied..... Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours... It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.

The question I want us to ask ourselves this morning.. in response to this text is this: Are you a SON or are you a slave?

Ironic isn't it... that the prodigal who ran away returned with the hopes of being received as a SLAVE... but in a surprising turn of events... was WELCOMED as a SON..

At the same time. The elder son.. who is out working in the fields.. DOING all the duties of A SON - identifies himself as a SLAVE...

we see this in verse 29... Look! For many years I have been serving you! Serving is what a SLAVE does... This is not the identity of a son, but of a slave... **Instead of** relating to his father as a son.... he relates to him as a master and slave... All these years I have SERVED YOU...

Then he says.. And I have never DISOBEYED your commands... To the elder son, the father was an issuer of commands... No father wants his children to relate to him that way.. And the same is true of our father in heaven...

What happens when we relate to God in this way? What happens when we relate to God as a SLAVE and not a SON? Everything becomes GROSSLY distorted. We flip the gospel upside down.. and we deny the gospel of its POWER to save and transform lives...

You see... this might not sound like you... But there are probably a lot of you sitting here in this room this morning that live as SLAVES and not as sons...

But you ask.. WHOAH?!?! That's some harsh words.... to say.... and none of us are legalistic and uptight like this elder son is... right? I know... With the exception of Jae... NO ONE in this room works for their FATHER as DILIGENTLY as the elder son in this story...

BUT the heart issue HERE is precisely that... ITS IN THE HEART.... THE REAL ISSUE is that the heart of the elder son is alienated from the heart of the father... Although he is his son, his heart is in a completely different place...

In other words - THE ROOT OF SLAVERY mentality is NOT having your heart aligned with God's.

Most of us don't WORK hard and don't SERVE God like the Pharisees... but we come out to church... with our HEARTS ALIENATED do we not? Not aligned with God's purposes and his heart toward sinners.. toward the world... toward abortion and the global refugee crisis.. WE are often INDIFFERENT with things GOD has great concern for AND we LUST after things that GOD hates... And we might even come to church just out of ROUTINE.. not because we love God.. THAT is a slave mentality that will get you killed....

It will get you KILLED - BECAUSE... orthodoxy will not get you into heaven. Let me say that again, Orthodoxy - OR RIGHT doctrine WILL NOT SAVE YOU... Even right ACTIONS WILL NOT SAVE YOU... The only thing that can save you is a pure and undefiled faith in God which produces AN INTIMATE LOVE FOR THE FATHER - not just GOD, but God as FATHER!

Now what's really shocking is the way the father responds....

verse 31 - My son... you are always with me... and all that is mine is yours... It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found...

You see what the father does here? He doesn't command the son to get in... The son who according to him, never once DISOBEDIED his father's command.... Instead, the father ENTREATS him to come... WHY? The father could just as well have commanded his son to come in.. If the FATHER COMMANDED it, the son would have been FORCED TO OBEY!

I mean.. we've all been there before... HECK I've been there before... its an important family occasion... maybe a Christmas dinner or something.. and everyones waiting.. and you and your loved one... maybe your child.. have gotten into an argument... and so they go stomping off into their room.. AND IT make you SO ANGRY... because its ruining the mood ... and people are waiting... So most often... what you do is you just COMMAND them to come down... Open the door and get down here right this instant!

But God doesn't do that. He has all the power and authority to do so, but He doesn't do that. WHY? Paul, in writing his letter to Philemon says this:

8 Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you... that word APPEAL is the same word used here in Luke for entreat...

Although I am bold enough in Christ to COMMAND YOU... YET for love's SAKE... I prefer to APPEAL to you... AHA! There it is... Why does the father not command his elder son to come inside? FOR LOVE'S SAKE! God doesn't want US TO OBEY HIM for the sake of obedience... He WANTS us to LOVE HIM! He wants our HEARTS to aligned to Him! He wants US TO REJOICE with Him.. not just BE WITH HIM....

You see what's at stake here? God has a right to command you... But His desire is not to build a relationship on master/slave dynamics..

He wants you to be a SON! He wants you to be DAUGHTER He doesn't need MORE SERVANTS - Indeed, HE NEEDS NO SERVANTS.. This is what sets the God of the Bible apart from al the pantheon of FALSE gods out there... THE TRIUNE GOD of the BIBLE WORKS FOR US. HE WORKS FOR THOSE WHO

WAIT UPON HIM AND FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM! Indeed, Jesus Himself said that He came to SERVE, not to be served... to the point of SERVING us by DYING for us on a cross! FOR OUR SINS!

My child.. You are always with me... You are always with me and you get to eat with me everyday.....

Why are you so bent over a goat? You get to eat with me EVERYDAY! Spend time with me and grow old with me... So WHATS THERE TO LACK?

What we see here the result of the slave mentality of the elder son... And its SICK.. I WANT to be with my friends and eat GOAT! Instead I'm here stuck with you all these years... WORKING for you.

There are many people like this... who LOVE GIFTS more than the giver of the gifts... Who have MUCH love what God has to offer but have little love for God...

That's not what God wants! He isn't after a people that turn Him into a genie.. He isn't after robots that obey His every command... He isn't after people that FIND HIM BORING and just use Him... He is AFTER A PEOPLE TO BE IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP with.. so intimate that the Bible uses language of ADOPTION and MARRIAGE to convey that intimacy... GOD wants you to BE LIKE HIM - He wants TO GLORIFY YOU by making you more and more like Jesus Christ...

Obedience comes out of THAT, not before!

I will end on this note.. and its going to require a response.... The end of the parable is scary... because its a cliff-hanger.. it just stops.. WILL the elder son COME IN OR WILL he stay out on the porch?

God is asking us that very same question this morning... Are you going to come in... or are you going to stay on the outside.. looking in? Are you a slave, or are you a son? Are you going to LOVE God for His gifts or are you going to LOVE God for WHO HE IS and ALL THAT HE HAS ALREADY done for you in the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ?

Why don't we all spend a few minutes in prayer... responding to God.. confessing our SIN.. and laying down before him OUR HEARTS which are so prone to wander. And I will end by praying for us all...