**Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 (ESV)**

**1** Now 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.” **3** So he told them this parable: **11** And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. **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. **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. **14** And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **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. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. **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! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19**  I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ **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. **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.’ **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. **23** And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. **24** For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. **25** “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **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.’ **28** But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, **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. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ **31** And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. **32** It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

**“The Father Loves His Children”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Some consider parables to be talking about spiritual matters in earthly terms. I say parables are far from spiritual but serious matters that we face here on earth. The parable labeled as the “Prodigal Son” stands right next to two other parables about a lost sheep and lost coin. They all deal with the same emphasis as what Jesus says, “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). The last parable on the two brothers and their father goes right to the heart of earthly matters. Open sinners and social outcasts were repenting to hear Jesus, while the Pharisees and scribes had no room for His Word grumbling against Him. The division was evident, but I mean between God and man not merely between people.

What we face today is the sorry conditions of brokenness. It goes right to the heart of family. Fatherlessness has become the greatest disaster. Research shows fatherless homes brings great risk to children for criminal activity, suicide, behavioral disorders, high school dropout, confused identities, aggression, loss of achievement, and other sad stories. [[1]](#footnote-1) Rather than trying to choose which of the two sons is better than the other in our parable. The sacrifice, love, and care exclusively shining forth by the Father stands out. This extends far beyond family life, but towards God being a loving Father to Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, lawless or lawful, and broken or unbroken families. Of course, the Father in heaven is only seen by His true Son the Word become flesh on earth. Jesus states, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30) and “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Thank God, He forgives on His terms as Father and not ours for it is a family of faith reconciled for all by Jesus.

Before we address the love of the father. We turn to look at his sons. The best way to summarize it is that they were spoiled. Their selfishness took advantage of their father. We first see it in the youngest son. Naïvely he takes center stage and demands the heritance divided. His kind word of “Father” was a nice way of finally telling dear old dad, “Just die.” He was in it for personal gain denouncing any relationship with his Father. How darkened is the sinful heart that stands boldly against God. It truly is all consuming turned to self. Luther declares it is, “…drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride and greed, pleasure and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord and Creator….For we sin daily with eyes and ears, hands, body and soul, money and property, and with all that we have. This is especially true of those who even fight against the Word of God” (Tappert 413:21-22).

The other spoiled aspect with the youngest son is when he hits rock bottom. Everything spiraled out of control from no cash, to slave labor by a foreigner, to facing religious disgrace with pigs, to a dead end with the words, “…and no one gave him anything.” It is at that moment, the young son remembers his father and turns to repentant, but this repentance demanded control on his terms. He would say, “Treat me as one of your hired servants.” There was no trust in the father only taking advantage of how well he provided for his workers. “The son’s repentance is similar to what many in Jesus’ day considered repentance, that is, repentance as a human work, with an offer, from the person’s side, of conditions, terms, and reparations.” (Just 598). Many in various religions repent over wrongdoing and make amends, but it is apart from faith in God’s undeserved love. Even the baptized can turn repentance into a negotiations saying to God, “Sorry, I will try harder next time” or “Sorry, I will make it up to you.” As if works will ever be greater than a Father who forgives, guides, and saves sinners all by His grace.

The first son was spoiled for sure, but the second son takes the cake. This oldest one benefited from being in the presence of his father, had protection at home, heard loving words over the years, but none of it mattered when push came to shove. The action of his father toward his brother was unfair and a slap in the face. Such jealously turned into anger denying any part at the party. It was a public disgrace to hear not “Father,” but “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.” He practically is saying the whole time was never a blessings. Rather than sharing joy with the Father, how quickly can we find fault in our neighbor? We can dish it out but can we take the fact that God loves them to the end! Bitterness just gets the best of us. Anger arises no less like Cain toward Abel. What comes is a despising of love from God that we ourselves could never foresee as good or ever consider to give.

The two spoiled sons are no hope in this parable. This is why the sacrifice, love, and care exclusively shines forth by the Father. To grasp this undeserved grace for us still today is to go to Jesus. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). More than dividing an earthly inheritance, the truth has been revealed from heaven. The Father has given His one and only Son born of the Virgin Mary. Rather than beating a sinful world with judgment by its outrageous demands, God chose to save the children of Adam and Eve. His Word of the Savior is the freest and most faithful promise made known by baptism into His Name. It lasts far longer than any plans that waste away in the hands of sinners. St. Paul says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Justification means God already paid for every sinner who ran off in selfishness. Jesus has paid the full penalty of a wasted life by bottoming out all judgment upon Him.

The sacrifice by the Father of His Son stands out by the humiliating way He loves. God goes to no expense to turn sinners to repent and believe in Him. Where the youngest son had a plan for repentance, the Father came running like a fool even to embrace and kiss what was unclean. He had compassion for the sorry state of affairs. Compassion is made up of two Latin words. “Com” which means “together” and “Pati” which is “to suffer.” In other words, God comes to suffer with sinners. Jesus is the Father’s compassion who loves to take upon Himself our shame and speak forgiveness. It is why sinners and tax collectors listened to Jesus. There is no negotiating on our terms just to confess, “I have sinned against you.” Justification is the righteousness we purely have by grace through faith in Jesus. His holiness and beauty the Father hands over to us. It changes hearts so we can pray, like today, “Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience.”

Did the Father treat His sons differently? No, the good news rests in the unchanging fact of this Father. His love appears different between the two, but not in what He said. What father would first put up with such mockery and belittlement, especially by a son who knew better! Nonetheless, He came out to him and after hearing the ranting rage. He said, “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 self-righteous Pharisees and law-abiding even today have their pound of flesh at the cross. Holy Week tests the patience of God to the point where Jesus cries out for all, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” The brokenness has been mended by the beating, despising, and death of God’s Son. Jesus calls all to repent and receive His sacrifice of love declaring we are not fatherless. Great is this feast of victory from our Father by sending us His Son. It is a party around the true body and blood of Jesus for forgiveness, life and salvation. As Isaiah declared, “Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” Thank God, He forgives on His terms as Father and not ours for it is a family of faith reconciled for us by Jesus. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://fatherhood.about.com/od/fathersrights/a/fatherless\_children.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)