

“Where there’s a will, there’s a relative.” that’s what I always say.

And in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we meet a relative who wants to get his ‘sticky fingers’ on his father’s estate, long before he’s even dead...

And it’s not because his dad is:

- a cantankerous old sod; or
- he’s distant; or
- controlling.

He is a Father who genuinely **loves** his children. And he craves to be in a loving relationship with his children... And yet, he doesn’t force himself upon them. He’s a dad who allows His children to go their own way (even when it’s bad for them).

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, is one of the best-known parables of Jesus. And why wouldn’t it be??? It is a beautiful image. It paints the picture of those who reject God – of those who want to have nothing whatsoever to do with God; and it paints a picture of the utter hopelessness and despair, that their chosen path often leads to...

And the beauty of it, is how our Heavenly Father is watching; seeking; longing for the return of His children... And we catch a glimpse, of just how much our Heavenly Father celebrates, at the return of a lost sinner. And we see, how the grace and mercy of God, instantly restores, the worst of sinners... Those who at one time, totally rejected the Father, as soon as they repent, they are brought, to the inside, and restored as “sons”...

So, it's a beautiful parable.

But, because this parable is so well known, we sometimes don't get the full message, because we take it on its own... But it's not meant to be taken on its own. Jesus told this parable as part of a larger response, to something that was unfolding before the eyes of the Disciples.

This is how it all fits together:

In Chapter 14, Jesus has just talked about the Parable of the Great Banquet, and about how God is inviting; and inviting; and inviting. And about how some (who are supposed to be close to God) reject God's invitation. And so He sends His servants out to the streets and the lanes; and then, to highways and byways... The invitation was sent to those who are far from God: "Come; Come; My banquet table will be filled!!!".

And so, we've got the invitation. And then He talks about the cost of **being** a Disciple of Jesus.

And then He talks about "salt", and how if salt loses the very essence of what it means to be salt, it's not good for anything – just throw it out.

And if God's people lose the very essence of what it means to **be** God's people (Think: faith; faithfulness; The perspective of "The Father's business" being our business; our hearts being aligned with The Father's heart)... And if God's

people lose the very essence of what it means to be God's people, they're good for nothing but to be thrown out.

And chapter 14 finishes with the words, "**He who has ears to hear, let him hear**".

And then immediately, we come into chapter 15, and, **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."**

And so, Jesus tells 3 stories about the lost: The lost sheep; The lost coin; The lost son...

Jesus told the Parable of the Lost Son, because those who were coming to hear Him, were the worst of sinners. The Scribes and Pharisees criticised Jesus for eating with them. In their eyes, they were the riff-raff – the epitome of reprobates to be avoided... As far as they were concerned, repentant sinners had no place in God's Kingdom.

Can you see what's happening? The religious leaders were supposed to be near to God, but they had lost the very essence of what it means to be God's people. Their hearts were far from the Heart of God...

So:

Last week, we studied the parables of the lost **sheep** and the lost coin. And we discovered something about the nature of God... Yes, He seeks the lost; He searches for the lost... But the **focus** of those Parables, was on the **celebration** – It was an unexpected and unreasonable level of celebration, at the finding of that which was lost...

And it's not because of the value of the item... It's because of the nature of our Saviour...

It is wonderful/glorious, when the grace and mercy of God, restores a sinner, to righteousness in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, Jesus has been building up to the parable of the Lost Son. The focus has been on “repentance” and “celebration”.

In the sheep story, Jesus said:

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.

In the coin story, Jesus said:

I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And we need to understand these parables, **before** we get into the Parable of the Lost Son...

You see, if we **begin** with the Parable of the Lost Son, we could be in danger of becoming “conceited”. We might say: *“It is because we are so valuable, that heaven celebrates our new-found faith”*... But you see, in the Sheep story and the

Coin story, we've already established, it's not about the value of what was lost – it's about the value of the seeking and saving nature of God, and how He can do the impossible.

It is Glory to God, for what **He** has done, in **saving** the lost... **He** is the one, who brings a sinner to repentance. And now, in the parable of the Lost Son, we discover how “that which is dead, is raised to life”, and how a repentant sinner is immediately restored to an honoured position of being a child of God. Not because **we** are so wonderful, but because **God** is.

And the **restoration**, is the cause of celebration...

Righto, so, let's get into the Parable:

A man had 2 sons, and the younger son demands his share of the inheritance, up-front...

Now, the normal inheritance tradition of their day, was that the Eldest Son would get a double portion. E.g., if there were 7 sons, the Estate would be divided into 8, and the eldest son would get $\frac{2}{8}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the estate, and each of the other 6 sons would get $\frac{1}{8}$ of the estate.

In this case, there's only 2 sons, so the estate would be divided into three. The elder son would get $\frac{2}{3}$ of the estate, and the younger son would get $\frac{1}{3}$ of the estate (still a significant inheritance).

But the younger son: He shows a:

- total disregard;
- complete lack of respect/appreciation;
- total rejection of his father;

Basically, by him demanding his inheritance now, what's he telling his dad? "You're dead to me."...

*In 1882, the German Philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche said "Gott ist tot" "God is Dead" ... It seems quite poignant, doesn't it... Because that's what sin is – to reject God. And the **ultimate** rejection of God, is to treat Him as if He is dead/irrelevant/non-existent... BTW, only about 7 years after Nietzsche wrote that in his book, he descended into insanity, and at the age 55, he died... Nietzsche now knows, that God is **not** dead, but Nietzsche is...*

Anyway, we have a picture of a son who treats his Father as if he is dead. He has zero allegiance to his father, and he wants to become his own master.

So, he demands his share of the Father's property "now". And in the original Greek, it really brings out the pain this would cause the Father. The son demands his share of the property. And the Father divides his βίον (bion) (Life; Living; means of subsistence)...

But the younger son:- he doesn't seem to appreciate it. It's not like he wanted his inheritance so he could "make a go of It" and continue on, the father's legacy.

He treats his father with utter disdain. He despised his inheritance/His father's "living"...

Very soon afterwards, he sold up. He cashed-out, and up-and-left. He headed off to a land far, far away (It sounds like a fairy-tale doesn't it, but not a very nice one). And there, he squandered his money on reckless living.

And this is a really good illustration of "sin". Sin is the rejection of God and it is to distance one's-self from God. And when a person consciously makes the decision "I want to be my own Lord/Master/Boss/choose my own way..." that will often set a path, that will take them deep into a life of corruption and depravity...

And we've seen this (?)... When a child is:

- brought up in a Christian family;
- brought up in the ways of God;
- learned to pray; and
- experienced the love of God, and the love of a Christian church...

But they get to an age where they reject it, and they turn their back on the faith of their parents and the love of God and the worship of God...

It breaks a parent's heart (?)... And it breaks the heart of our Heavenly Father...

But more often than not, when they make that break, it's not just a change in what they believe – it's a descent – it's a casting off of moral restraint, and a descent into not only a rejection of God, but a rejection of Godliness.

Anyway, the younger son heads off to a land far, far away, and he spends his entire inheritance... He's doing it his own way...

I went to a funeral once, where, as the coffin was lowered into the grave, they played Frank Sinatra singing, "I did it my way"... How sad is that??? What a hopeless proclamation at a funeral – at a moment where "My way" counts for naught. To do it my way and not God's way, leads only to death.

Back to the son:

He spent everything, and he had nothing... And then the famine hit... And God will often use times of brokenness/hopelessness/destitution, to bring us back to our senses... And that's what happens here.

The younger son is absolutely destitute. He's got:

- nothing left to spend;
- nothing to eat;
- nowhere to live;
- no one to help him out...

That's when you know you're totally broken... When you are all alone, and no one to help.

So, he took on a job – the lowest job in the land. He was sent into the fields to feed the pigs... Now, remember, Jesus is

telling this story to Jews. To them, this would have to be the lowest of the low – his job, was feeding filthy pigs...

Now, if there are any pig-farmers listening to this online, I want to thank you for your service. I do quite enjoy roast pork; a nicely cured & smoked ham; or bacon for breakfast... But there's a lot of jobs I would much rather do, then work in a piggery. I remember at the Ag college when I used to have to work in the piggery, by the end of the week, the smell of pigs was ingrained into your hands... Yuck...

But not only did he have to work with the filthy pigs – he was jealous of the pigs. They ate better than he did...

he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

But then he came to his senses... “Why don't I go home and work for Dad?” Not as a son – just as a hired worker.

my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I'm dieing of hunger here...

And he rehearses in his mind, what he's going to say. And in this, we have a picture of deep repentance. He's expressing sorrow – not for what he's lost, but for what he has done.

“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.”

And so, he comes to the Father, bearing nothing but his need, and the only thing he has to offer, is “repentance”...

But, what he wasn't counting on, was the type of welcome he would get from his father... He may well have treated his father as if he was dead. And he had thrown away the gift the Father had given him,, but while he was still a great way off, the Father saw him coming...

And that's the thing with God. A person may make a conscious decision, to reject Him, and to follow their own way, And He just lets them go... And sometimes they will need to descend to rock-bottom; to a place of absolute brokenness, before they come to their senses and turn to the Father...

But when they do, God is waiting... **while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.**

Here's the thing: When a person turns to God, we come to Him, the only way we can: In all of our brokenness/sin/rebellion and wrong-doing...

Did you notice, that the repentant son didn't even get to start his rehearsed speech... The Father embraced him and kissed him before he said a word... He probably still had the filth of the pigs on him...

You know, people talk about “praying the sinners prayer”, as if that’s what gets you saved... God knows your heart **before** those words come out of your mouth. He knows the very moment at which you have repented of your sin, because repentance isn’t a matter of words – it’s a matter of a change of heart/mindset/actions. The words merely express the repentance that has already occurred.

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.**

The son, knew he didn’t deserve to be called a son... He came, prepared to just be as a hired servant... But, the Father felt compassion. You see, with repentance, comes reconciliation.

Does a repentant sinner deserve to be honoured as a child of God? Absolutely not. But our gracious God, gives us what we do **not** deserve. That’s what grace is. While we were still sinners, Jesus died, to save us from our sins... And so, when

we repent, the work that Jesus has already done, restores us to **full** fellowship with the Father.

You don't have to ease your way into prayer/worship/church/fellowship with the "holy" people...

With repentance, comes instant restoration to fellowship. You belong. You fully belong... And did you notice, it's actually an image of resurrection. To the Father, the younger son was dead. But now he's alive again. And this should remind us, how destructive "sin" is. At one time, we were dead in sin and wrong-doing. But now we are alive in Christ.

Righto:

So, the Father and his household are celebrating the return of the son.... Enter: The older son.

He's the reliable one. He's been dependable. Even now, as the party gets underway, he's still been working out in the paddock.

And as he comes home, he hears music and dancing... He probably pulls out his phone and looks at the calendar, "Have I missed an important date? What's going on?"

So, he calls out to one of the servants, "What's happening?"
"Oh, your brother's come back". **and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'**

But, the older brother didn't see that as a cause for celebration. He was angry. He refused to go in. So, his Father came out to him... And the older brother throws a bit of a tantrum...

And this is where it becomes obvious that the older brother is playing the part of the Scribes and the Pharisees. They were cranky that Jesus received sinners and when they repented, they were received into full fellowship. And the Scribes and pharisees believed that they had conscientiously served God (their whole lives). They were fastidious in keeping the commands of God.

And the older brother says, **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.**

What we're realising, is the older brother, doesn't desire a relationship with his Father... There's an invitation before him, to celebrate with his father. But his regret, is that he hasn't been able to celebrate with his friends...

He doesn't really desire a relationship with his father. He:

- He goes through the motions;
- He thinks he's obeying his father;
- He believes he's been working hard for the father...

But his father's got a celebration happening. There's roast beef being served, and he won't set-foot inside.

You see, the butchering of the fattened calf, was to provide a family celebration. Why were the family celebrating?

Because one of their own had returned. If the older son had a

heart like the father, he'd run inside and embrace his brother, and celebrate with his father.

And the father says:

'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.'

The promise of inheritance to come, is his... But his heart is out-of-line with the Father's heart.

³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.' "

Are you starting to realise that the Gospel isn't "fair"? It's not fair. Do you remember the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard? Those who worked all day, got paid a fair day's wage, but those who only worked for an hour, received the same pay-packet...

That, is the economy of the Gospel. It's not fair. It's **better** than fair. God is gracious, and gives us what we do **not** deserve...

The younger son didn't deserve to be restored as a son. But he came in repentance, and he was reconciled to the father... What a cause for joy/celebration...

The parable of the Lost Son, leaves us with 2 distinct messages. The first is for the lost – for those who have purposely turned their back on God, and have gone their own way. That path leads to heartache, and spiritual death...

And the message is, be like that younger son. Come to your senses... Don't wait until you've got it all together. None of us have anything of value to offer to God, and so we come in repentance.

Your heavenly Father, has His arms are open wide, and He's running to you. "I see you coming"... And as God meets the repentant sinner, there is instant restoration... All the years of selfishness and sin, are washed away with the blood of Jesus...

And our Heavenly Father rejoices; and the angels rejoice; and your new Christian family rejoice, because you were once dead, but now alive; once lost, but now you've come home...

And the 2nd message, is for those who have been Christians for a long time... The parable leaves us hanging. We don't know what ended up happening. Did the older brother go inside, and join the celebration??? Or did he stay outside? Away from the Father, and away from the fellowship of joy???

And that causes us to ponder: "If I've been a Christian for a long time, am I becoming like the older brother? ,where it's become all about "obedience" and "hard work", but like salt, that's lost its saltiness",,, Have I lost the very essence of what being a Christian is?

- Have I lost the joy of fellowship with the Father?

- Have I lost the joy of fellowship with a new believer?
- Have I lost the very essence of faith????

The Father's desire, is to gather His family together, in grace; and love; and celebration.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

We love You.

And we know (100%), that You love us.

We praise You, that Your Son,
made it possible for the sinner to be restored.
And at one time, I was that sinner.

We thank You, that as we come in repentance,
and turn away from all of our sin
and all of our wrong-doing,,,
there's nothing that we can do.
You take care of it all.

You take our sin away:
Your Word talks about how we are clothed
in robes of righteousness..

And You celebrate.

Lord,

give us hearts after The Father's heart.
That we would love the lost like You love the lost;
That we would seek the lost like You seek the lost;
That we would celebrate at the saving of one sinner;
because at one time, that one sinner was me.

Thankyou Lord.

Amen.