

LUKE 15:11-32, particularly vv. 25-32
NOT FAIR!

(Sermon read by Lay-Reader)

Verses 11-24

Then He [Jesus] said: A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.!" And they began to be merry.

Verses 25-32

Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, "Your brother has come! And because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf." But he was angry and would not go in.

Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him."

And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found!"

"That's not fair!" is a common complaint among children, and adults as well. When we feel that someone else has gotten more favorable treatment than we have, the words pour out "That's not fair."

At Jesus' time the Pharisees and the scribes were all about "fairness"—for themselves. In their own minds, they were extraordinarily good, and felt they should get the best treatment from God. The word "pharisee" means "separatist"—one who separates himself from others because he is so good. And "scribes" were those who copied the Old Testament word for word and letter by letter, and thus became very well acquainted with all the Old Testament requirements and laws--moral laws, worship laws, and civic laws. The scribes became "nit-pickers" about doing right.

Pharisees and scribes looked with disdain upon those who did wrong, especially upon tax collectors and "sinners." Tax collectors were those who "lowered" themselves to collect taxes for the ungodly Roman government which ruled over Israel and over the Mediterranean world. Tax collectors were allowed to overcharge and line their own pockets at their countrymen's expense. How would you feel if we in the U.S. were overrun by the Muslims and one of your neighbors began working for the non-Christian Muslims and became rich at your expense? Similarly, the "sinners" were those who did not keep ALL the Old Testament rules of God—perhaps didn't always bring the right sacrifice to the temple, didn't eat the right food, didn't rest properly on the Sabbath Day, and didn't always keep the 10 Commandments.

The scribes and Pharisees couldn't understand why Jesus, who claimed to be a prophet of God and the Messiah as well, would even associate with such people-- welcoming them, eating with them, etc. Jesus used the parable of the Prodigal (Wasteful) Son to teach them that He rejoiced in winning them back, not that He approved of their sins.

It is the second part of the parable that particularly touches upon the Pharisees' and scribes' reaction to Jesus' love and grace for the wayward.

When the younger brother returned repentant, the older brother did not understand his father's love, grace, and pardon for this foolish, wasteful, and disobedient younger brother. It wasn't fair!

Imagine if you came in from the field after working hard for your boss—tired, sweaty, and dirty—to find that a party was being held for a co-worker who had skipped six weeks of work, misused company funds, and now returned. That's not fair!

The older brother was so proud of his own good record that all he could see was his younger brother's soiled record. He had no heart and compassion for his wayward brother who humbly returned seeking forgiveness and pardon, who was no longer wild and bull-headed.

The father did NOT approve of the younger son's errors, had no joy in his disobedience. But the father rejoiced that his son had now returned repentant, seeking forgiveness, ready to serve.

That is what repentance is—having a change of heart and actions. It's not just mechanical words---“God have mercy on me a poor sinful being” and that's it. It is state of heart and mind. “Father, I do wrong, I try not to, but I do wrong. Father, I am sorry that I slip into sin again and again, that at times I deliberately *run* into error and sin. Please forgive me, for Jesus' sake. Your Son came to be punished for me. For Jesus' sake, please wash me clean—again. Help me to do better. Help me to return to thoughts, words, and actions that please You. For I love You because You have loved me first.”

That is the state in which the Lord wants every heart to be. A repentant heart gives Him great joy, and He welcomes repentant sinners back with arms of love.

The father in the parable was not happy that his son had sinned, but was happy that he returned seeking forgiveness and love. That is why Jesus' welcomed tax collectors and sinners. He did not approve of their sin, but He paid the price for their sin at the cross, rejoiced when they sought His forgiveness, and in that forgiveness did not continue to go their own devilish way.

The older brother felt cheated. Did he feel that his father approved of his brother's sins? Apparently. Did he feel his father did not love him? Seems so. Was he happy his brother was back with a new heart? No. All he could think of was his own good record compared to his brother's.

Do you rejoice to know that there is forgiveness for even the most wayward? Do you grasp God's joy at *their* return? Or do you just think of how good you have been and what you deserve for all that good? It's easy to do that. If a local slum, or bum, or ne'er-do-well, enters these doors for a service, is your heart filled with joy or with thoughts of “What are *they* doing here?” Do you give the time of day to those who have not walked with Christ? The older brother and the Pharisees and scribes thought about themselves. When you get to heaven and someone says to you, “I don't deserve to be here,” will you say, “I do.”

The truth is that the older brother too was wayward, but in a different manner. Did he serve his father out of love? Or out of duty to look at what he was accomplishing? What about you?

Jesus looks for all, for you too. His arms of compassion are open to cover you. You are received by His grace (His underserved love and pardon). You are forgiven. Now, do not stand aloof from other ne'er-do-wells, but seek to win them back. Rejoice in God's pardon for them as you rejoice in your own. Forget about looking at your own record. Look to Jesus. With a new heart rooted in the love of God for you, serve Him willingly because the Spirit has given you love to Him in return. Let your actions show that change of heart. Let your arms reach out to fellow sinners also, and forget about “Unfair!”

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach ---

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