

Theme: The father in the parable displays the merciful and gracious heart of God towards those who are lost.

I. Intro - Les Miserables and Gilead

- A. Gilead - wonderful novel about an old man writing a journal for his young son
- B. In many ways an expansion of themes in this parable - grace, mercy, forgiveness, judgmentalism
- C. We see these through the eyes of a 77-year-old 3rd generation pastor struggling with how to respond to a wandering godson
- D. This parable is one of the most loved - and also one of the most misunderstood!
- E. What is Jesus trying to teach us in this parable? How do we apply it in our own day and to our own lives?

II. The Background: Jesus, the “Sinners” and the Pharisees

- A. Jesus is attracting the “sinners” around Him
Now **the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him.** ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Luke 15:1–2
 - 1. Tax collectors and sinners - notorious groups of those who disobey God and are rejected by the religious people
 - 2. But these very people were attracted to Jesus!
 - 3. It appears that this happened habitually!
 - 4. Jesus’ words and actions drew those whose behavior normally caused them to keep their distance from religious people.

B. The Pharisees are not happy!

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ² **But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”** Luke 15:1–2

- 1. Pharisees and teachers of the law - the religious leaders in Judaism
- 2. They saw Jesus welcoming “sinners” - and even eating with them! They would never do such a thing!
- 3. They are muttering, murmuring, and grumbling
- 4. In every age, those who display God’s heart towards the lost and outcast are accused by those deemed “religious” as compromising - even when they are not!

C. Jesus’ response - in three parables

Then Jesus told them this parable: Luke 15:3

- 1. Jesus sees this - and tells a story!
- 2. Three stories with the same key point - God’s heart towards the lost.
- 3. We will be looking at the third parable - the parable of the man and his two sons
 - a. This is the longest and most detailed - and beloved!
 - b. Usually called “Parable of the Prodigal Son” but this is not really the best title
 - 1. Jesus does not call it this “man who had two sons”
 - 2. Prodigal does not refer to a wicked lifestyle but something that is reckless - and this is really best seen as a description of the father!

3. The parable is mainly about the father's heart - and then equally about the heart of each of the two sons.

III. The Basic Plot: A Father and His Two Sons

A. A father with two sons

There was a man who had two sons. Luke 15:11

1. This parable will deal only with people
2. It will deal with a father and each of his two sons
3. It will show the father's heart toward each son

B. The heartbreaking words and actions of both sons

1. The younger son misunderstands and breaks the father's heart

a. A rude, shameful, and hurtful request

The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Luke 15:12

1. This is rude even today - "Give me your stuff!"
2. This was even more rude, shameful, and hurtful in their culture!
3. The son is saying he is more interested in what the father has than the father himself.

b. The younger son leaves the father for distant lands

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. Luke 15:13

1. The son takes the possessions and leaves
2. This is a further rejection of the father, thinking true life will be found out of the father's presence

c. The disastrous results for the younger son

1. Son becomes destitute, working with pigs, starving
2. The father apparently has heard reports or at least can see the results of the son's folly and sin

So he got up and went to his father. **But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him...** Luke 15:20

3. Even though the son has rejected the father and gone away, the father's heart still longs for his son and is full of compassion for him.

2. The older son misunderstands and breaks the father's heart

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' Luke 15:28-30

- a. The older son is angry at the father's joy
- b. He views himself as a slave rather than a son
- c. He refuses to acknowledge his brother

C. Both sons misunderstand the father and break his heart

1. The younger son is rude, simply wants to be 'free'
2. The older son views himself as a slave and is angry at the father's mercy and joy
3. We will look at each son in the next two weeks
4. Neither son understands the father, and the words and actions of each of them bring pain to his heart

IV. The Father's Heart

A. The father's heart of love for his children

1. All three parables the lost objects are valued
2. The value of what is lost increases in each parable - 1 out of 100 sheep; 1 out of 10 coins; 1 - or both! - sons
3. This is why the father has compassion on the younger son
But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. Luke 15:20
4. Love prompts the father to forgive the younger son
"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. Luke 15:21-24
 - a. The son repents, and the father does not let him finish the speech
 - b. The father receives him as a son, not a slave
 - c. The father loves the son so much that all his rude, shameful, disrespectful words and behavior are forgiven.
5. This behavior of the father was scandalous and looked over-indulgent to Jesus' audience

6. This is prodigal grace - all sin is forgiven and the relationship with the father is restored.
7. The point of the story is the prodigal, reckless grace of God - which is our only hope!

B. The father's heart to seek to restore His lost children

1. This is the point of all 3 parables - God actively seeks to find the lost and bring them home.
2. This was something new for Jews! Rabbi's agreed that God would welcome the repentant sinner, but no one thought that God would lower Himself to seek the sinner out.
3. In the first two parables, the shepherd and the woman seek the sheep and the lost coin.
4. In this parable, the father is looking for the younger and runs to meet him.
So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. Luke 15:20
 - a. The son has shown repentance by starting the journey home because humans are not forced into a relationship with God
 - b. But note that the Father is looking, and while the son is a long way off runs to him
 - c. This was a scandalous picture - a father running to the sinning son and showing such lavish affection
5. The father seeks the hard-hearted older son as well
The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. Luke 15:28

- a. The older brother also refuses & shames the father
- b. The father goes out and seeks out the older brother
- c. When the older brother is terribly disrespectful, the father still speaks tenderly to the older brother

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” Luke 15:31–32
- d. This is once again scandalous behavior, to seek out such a disrespectful son, but the father values his children more than the opinions of others.

6. The prodigal, reckless, grace of God that seeks us out is our only hope!

C. The father’s heart of joy

- 1. The first two parables both end with the joy in heaven when the lost is found
- 2. The father is full of joy when the young son returns
 - a. He throws a huge feast when the son returns!

But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.’²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. Luke 15:22–24
 - b. He says there must be joy and celebration

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’³² **But we had to celebrate and be glad**, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” Luke 15:31–32

- c. The heart of the father is full of joy because of the restoration of a relationship with his wandering child
- 3. The father is not a dour man, but one whose heart is full of joy that he longs to share with his children.
- 4. The younger son erred in thinking that joy was found outside of the father’s presence, while the older brother erred in thinking that what the father wanted was dour, joyless obedience.
- 5. But true joy was found in the father’s presence, and in a loving relationship with him.

V. Applying the Word

A. Do I know the Father’s heart?

- 1. So many today misunderstand the heart of God!
- 2. Many are like the younger son thinking that true joy will be found outside the Father’s Presence.

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” - CS Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*
- 3. Many are like the older brother thinking that what God wants is dull, slavish, joyless, obedience
- 4. But what God wants is a relationship with us. This is what brings Him - and us - joy!
- 5. Do I know deep in my gut that the Father’s heart is full of love for me?

6. Do I know that the Father loved me so much that He sought me out - even at the cost of His own Son?
7. Do I know that the Father desires a close, daily relationship with me, and rejoices when it exists?

B. The Table of the Father's Heart

1. At this Table, we are reminded of the Father's heart of love for us
2. At this Table, we are reminded that the Father sought us
3. At this Table, we are reminded of the Father's heart of joy and celebration with His people
4. Come to the Table!

The Father's Heart

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

January 6, 2019

Communion

2 John 1:3

Teaching keywords: grace; God's character; forgiveness

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.
2 John 1:3

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ Then Jesus told them this parable:...

¹¹ "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” Luke 15:1–3, 11–32