

Noosa Anglican - March 20, 2022
Luke through Lent - Hard Lessons
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C S Lewis was once asked by a sceptic, "Name me one thing Christianity offers me which I can't get somewhere else?"

Lewis's answer was, "Forgiveness."

Today's Gospel reading is about forgiveness, but forgiveness with a surprise. The message is that everyone needs forgiveness. It is not just the bad people who need to be forgiven for all the bad things they've done. It is also the respectable people who need forgiveness just as much.

Our story in Luke 15 has three characters- a Father and two sons. This parable is often called the parable of the Prodigal Son or sometimes the parable of the Loving Father. But it equally could be called the parable of the Older Brother.

The Father of course represents God our heavenly Father. The two brothers represent two kinds of people. The younger brother was an extrovert who loved a good party and was out to enjoy himself. The older brother was an introvert who worked hard and was very responsible.

The message of the parable is that both brothers needed to repent. The younger brother, it is obvious where he needed to repent. He needed to stop the wild living, stop spending all his father's money, stop thinking the meaning of life was totally wrapped up in pursuing pleasure.

The surprise in this parable is that the older brother also needed to repent.

You may well ask why? Surely he was the responsible one, working hard on the farm always doing what his father wanted.

He had no obvious sin like his younger brother, did he?

Did he really need to be forgiven as well?

But more on that later.

To understand the parable we really need to look at the context in which Jesus tells it, and this is given to us in verses 1&2 of the Chapter.

READ Lk15:1-2.

Jesus is telling this parable against the Pharisees who were grumbling about Jesus spending time with tax collectors and sinners. It was the tax collectors and sinners who needed to repent then they would have been worthy of Jesus company. The Pharisees thought they didn't need to repent; they kept the law, they were the responsible religious ones.

The tax collectors are like the younger brother - obvious sinners.

The Pharisees are like the older brother - respectable sinners.

They appear to occupy very different positions in life but in actual fact are in exactly the same position before God - both groups are sinners. The point at which they are different is that the tax collectors are recognising they are sinners and coming to Jesus for forgiveness where as the Pharisees are not recognising they are sinners and rejecting Jesus.

The primary point of this parable is actually to help the Pharisees realise they are sinners too and they need the Saviour.

But let's get into the parable and look at each of the characters in more detail.

THE YOUNGER BROTHER

This boy was bad. Imagine your son asking you for the family inheritance. The least we can say is that it was very rude. In the Middle-east it was an absolute insult. It was the same as saying, "Dad I wish you were dead."

Not only did the younger brother insult his father by asking for the inheritance; he then went and wasted it on wild living and prostitutes. This fellow was a real heel, a narcissist; a self-indulgent, ungrateful, disobedient son.

As you would expect the day of reckoning comes. The money runs out. This younger brother finds himself eking out an existence feeding pigs. What an insult to any good Jewish boy. The slops he is feeding the pigs even start to look attractive for eating. That's how low he sank.

But then he realises he has done wrong and decides to return to the father, beg forgiveness and see if his father will at least give him a job as a hired servant.

THE FATHER

Well can you imagine the love of that father? He doesn't just accept his son back, he runs down the path to embrace him and celebrate his return. Most fathers would be waiting at the top of the stairs, tapping their toe, with a scowl on their face and a big please explain! "What have you done with the money?"

But this father takes a different course. He rejoices over his son and throws him a big party. He treats him like a king. He thought he had lost his son, that he was dead. But the younger son has come to his senses and returned home, and the father is simply overjoyed! In verse 24 he says, *"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found!"* So the celebration begins.

- Are you like the younger brother?
- Are you the rebellious runaway from home type?
- Have you done things in your life you're deeply ashamed of?
- Do you need to repent, turn around and come back to the father?

The reason Jesus came to this earth was to show us the way to return to the Father. To turn away from obvious sins that have hurt others ... and in the end of course hurt you.

Put your faith in Jesus, repent of your sins and you will know the embrace of the Father.

For many of you this maybe your story. It maybe exactly why you are here now. You know the rotten things you've done in your life and you know Jesus has forgiven you. You have a heart that is overjoyed with the father's embrace that he could forgive even you. And because you have been loved that much you have much love to give. You are a gospel hearted forgiven sinner. God bless you if you're the younger brother type.

THE OLDER BROTHER

However you may be more like the older brother? You've been a good honest hard-working, church attending person all your life. You've honoured your parents and always tried to live up to

the standard they taught you. You'd never think about running away from home. It maybe you've never even got a parking ticket in your life.

Well guess what? The surprise message in this parable is, you need to repent just as much as those younger brother types.

What we have to realise is the older brother is just as much cut off from the father as the younger brother. Both of them, you see, don't really want the father.

Neither of them understand the father.

The father operates out of grace, and that is something the older brother especially has no idea about.

The younger brother obviously doesn't care about the father. He only wants the father's things—"Give me the inheritance so I can live it up and have a good time."

But the older brother doesn't care about father either. He doesn't understand the father's heart. He doesn't understand how his father can be so happy when his younger brother comes home. All he cares about is the way the younger brother has lost the family inheritance. All he really cares about is the money.

So in many ways he is just like the younger brother.

-He loves the father's things more than the father.

-He wants the father's money but not the father.

So in terms of motivation they are actually the same - they both want the father's things.

The only point where they differ is their strategy for getting those things.

-The younger brother's strategy is to be very very bad.

-The older brother's strategy is to be very very good.

But outward behaviour isn't what is most important, motivation is. God looks at the motivation of the heart.

The problem with older brother types is that they believe God is pleased with them because they are so good, but they are actually alienated from the father. When the father comes out and invites the older brother into the party—he refuses to come in. The father comes out to both sons and invites both to come to the party. And the really shocking thing is the younger brother comes in but the older brother refuses. And you know what that means?

– The bad boy is saved

– The good boy is lost.

Are you shocked by that?

I think Jesus wants us to be shocked.

I'm sure the Pharisees were shocked because he was talking about them.

The good boy is lost!

This older brother is lost not in spite of his goodness but because of his goodness.

His good deeds have blinded him to his need.

He is being good for the wrong reasons. He says to the father, "I never disobeyed you." In other words I deserve your things. I deserve that you treat me better than you are, because of my goodness.

You see there are two ways of thinking.

1. The way of religion – I obey therefore God should accept me, maybe even reward me.
2. The way of the gospel - God accepts me because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross for me, therefore I obey.

1. The way religion says I give God a righteous record and then he owes me.
2. The way of the gospel says God gives me a righteous record in Jesus Christ therefore I want to live a life of gratitude for all he has done for me.

1. A religious person is trying to be good so that God will accept them in the end.
2. A gospel person says, I have forgiveness. I'm a child of my heavenly Father. God has made me a new creation in Christ Jesus.

I am reconciled to God and he has now committed to me a ministry of reconciliation.

Gospel people don't obey God in order to get acceptance or to get things from God,
Gospel people obey simply to get more of God.

So people like the older brother need to repent just as much as people like the younger brother. Yes both groups need to repent, however the repentance is different. Older brother repentance is not about being sorry for doing wrong; it's about repenting of the wrong reasons for doing good. It's repenting of the pride that makes them think they can earn their way into God's favour. In the end their good works are all about 'them' rather than God and that is sin.

Let me tell you the story of a gentleman I knew in a previous parish.

He worked in the mining industry and was successful in his career.

He worked his way up to becoming the manager of a very large mine.

However after a while the pressure of the position started to take its toll and he turned to the bottle to help him cope. It helped for a while but he became an alcoholic and his health started to deteriorate.

So did his marriage. I witnessed the breakup of his marriage and worked with both him and his wife through a very difficult time.

The good news part of this story is that this fellow became a Christian. He agreed to do the Christianity Explained course with me. It was in Week 4 the penny dropped. He read Ephesians 2:8,9. "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not your own doing but a gift of God, not to do with works lest anyone should boast.

This man had gone to a church school.

He had been through all the Christian rites of passage.

He thought that being a good person made him a Christian.

But now it dawned on him that salvation was not his to earn, but a gift, not because of good works, but because of grace. He realised all he had to do was receive the gift of Jesus and all that he had done on the cross.

He went home from the course that night and read that verse again but then read the whole book of Ephesians. TWICE and I remember him saying it was like having the scales removed from his eyes.

Everything was now different. He realised it was not about morality and rites of passage. It was about the love of God in the Gospel. He now simply wanted to revel in that love. He wanted Jesus

to be Lord over his life, and he went on to lead a men's ministry in the church where he sought to communicate this wonderful message to other men.
He also went on to become a Warden and a Synod Rep.

-This gentleman had been following the way of religion, but now he was following the way the gospel.

-He had thought he could present a righteous record to God, now he humbly accepted the righteous record God wanted to give him in Jesus Christ.

He was lost but how he is found.

My friends our church has a great vision Living to Love and Proclaim Jesus.

That is a Gospel vision.

It's about loving Jesus and proclaiming Jesus because he has saved us.

We've given up trying to save ourselves.

We just want to love him and be a living sacrifice for him. That's the basis for the good works and there is no other.

CONCLUSION

This parable has been described as the gospel in the Gospel.

It shows us the great themes of Scripture-

-the overwhelming grace of God

-the sinfulness of human nature

-the obvious form of sin

-being bad

-the subtle form of sin

-being self-righteous

-this passage shows us the need for repentance at every level and for every person type.

-it shows us how God is more than willing to meet us halfway when we do turn.

What is one thing Christianity can offer you that you can't get anywhere else?

It's forgiveness.

It offers the Rebel forgiveness

- the younger brother type.

It offers the respectable person forgiveness – the older brother type.

Both needed forgiveness.

Both needed to repent.

The Father wanted them both to come to the party.

Which type of brother are you?

Have you repented?

Are you enjoying the father's party.

[The Father is simply waiting for you to repent; to accept the invitation and come to the party.]