

Parable of the Lost Son & the Grumpy Brother

Luke 15:11-31.

This is a follow on from the discussion titled 'Losing Stuff', so bear in mind the context. This is the third of 3 parables given to Pharisees who were openly criticising Jesus for eating with ostracised tax collectors.

In this parable, we've got a father (represented as God), two sons (we'll come back to who they represent) and a farm (the kingdom of heaven).

One day at breakfast, the younger son drops a bombshell. He's bored with farming, he wants some fun. Phrases like: 'life's too short' and 'you only live once', were banded about. This younger son represented the tax collectors that Jesus was hobnobbing with. They had abandoned their principles, were colluding with the Roman occupiers and were employed as tax collectors. A job that was well paid and had generous fringe benefits, like being able to rob the tax payers.

The father somehow finds enough money to give his son half the value of the estate. The next day, the father watches his son leave with a large suitcase and a fat wallet. Soon, he disappears over the horizon.

The son, he party, party, parties until all his money is spent. So, it was time to find a job, but there were no jobs because there was a famine taking hold. The only job available was in a pig farm but it seems he earned less than the pigs, so he quickly went very hungry. Where are his new found mates that he used to be so popular with?

Then he has a lightbulb moment. 'My Dad's servants have a better quality of life than I do.' So he ups sticks and walks. In his head, he's composed a grovelling apology to Dad and starts walking. Dad was constantly at the farm gate watching out for his son, longing and hoping for his return. When he sees this tiny silhouette on the horizon, he recognises it: it's his little boy! He instantly does a mad dash towards him. As soon as Dad's in hearing distance, the son starts to recite his prepared speech but his Dad's not listening. He just throws his arms around his little boy and gives this pongy, wretched lad a big bear hug. There's instant and real intimacy there. He then instructs his servants: 'Put the best robe on him, a ring on his finger and sandals for his feet.'

In the Bible, the robe represents righteousness, Zechariah 3:4 and again in the parable of The Marriage Feast Matthew 22:12 as well as priestly robes in Leviticus. However, there's no stand-out biblical verses about the significance of sandals or rings. So why did Jesus specifically say sandals and a ring rather than a bath and clean underwear? Was this not an answer to the son's question: can I be your servant? No, the father didn't want more servants, he's got enough of them, and if he needed more, he'd recruit more. No, he just wanted his son back.

Then it's party time! Before we join the party, let's think about why the son returned to the father. What was the trigger? Was he missing his family? Was it conscience? No, He was starving, he craved pig-feed but even that was beyond his reach. So he decides he's going back home and if necessary he'll eat humble pie. What does that tell us about bad motives for coming back to God? There's no such thing.

Back to the party. The fatted calf. This was for the celebration of important guests, Genesis

18:7-8. Wow! What a turnaround this was.

Let's put ourselves in the mindset of the son; what's the worst that could happen? A lecture - You've made your bed, now you lie in it! What was the best outcome he'd hoped for? A butty and some soup and then put to work. He did not in his wildest dreams expect a celebration on this scale. Jesus gives us the father's rationale, Luke 15:23. Can you feel the love the father has for his little boy and his relief?

Then we come to misery guts. The elder son comes in from working hard in the fields, in the heat of the day and he wonders why there's a party going on. When he finds out, he sulks. Dad comes out to reason with him. Elder son has a tantrum; in his eyes, he's a model son. The fault lies with his brother and his dad's lack of appreciation of him. Read Luke 15:28-31. Can you see and understand where elder son is coming from? Let's look at his complaints, in the context that the elder son = the Pharisees -

I've worked like a slave and I've been very obedient. Luke 18:9-14.

You've given me nothing. Luke 7:36-50.

The elder son plays the victim card. Note, he denies any relationship with his brother. He then goes into his brother's shortcomings. He's totally perplexed at why his dad is even giving him the time of day. What does that tell us of the relationship between the two brothers?

Dad tries to reason with him. Can you see his logic? What did dad mean by, 'everything I have is yours'?

The elder son (the Pharisees) obviously cannot see why his dad is so happy. He really doesn't get it.

What lesson can we draw from this parable? Could it apply to the repentant backsliden Christian? Does Hebrews 6:4-6 contradict that? IMO, no. Hebrews 6 is more about 'flaky believers', whose short term acceptance of the logic of the Gospel is quickly forgotten and replaced by other distractions, ie: the 2nd and 3rd soils in Matthew 33:3-23.

What's the one difference between the shepherd and the woman and the coin, and the father in this parable? Why didn't the father go looking for his son?

What would have happened to the younger son had he not come back home to his father?

What other lessons can we draw from this parable?

We are free to leave and abandon our faith at any time. And we can misappropriate any of God's previous blessings in pursuit of our sinful desires. God will be devastated but won't try to prevent us from leaving.

If we do leave, expect calamity to be close behind.

If and when we come to our senses, God is waiting for us.

God will immediately want to restore us back into the family, there's no period of rehabilitation.

God will completely forgive and forget all our sins. We might not, others might not, but He certainly does.