



Autumn 2017 – **The fierce passion of the Father 2**
(the 5: 19 November & the 10: 26 November,
Paul Langham)

Reading: **Luke 15:11-32**

¹¹ Jesus continued: '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 servants 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 servants." 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 round 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 elder 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 elder 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.'"

RE-CAP on Last Week

- For many, the word "father" brings up painful memories or simply a blank face where a familiar one should be
- But in revealing God as 'Father', the bible introduces us to the possibility of relationship with a father who is fiercely passionate about his children (those he adopts into his family as a result of their trust in his Son – John 1:12)

That seems to have been a revelation to some ...

INTRODUCTION

Interesting that the parable is called 'The Prodigal Son'.

Jesus didn't give it that (or any other) title – he simply says, 'There was a man who had two sons.' In other words, the story is not about 1 person but about 3 ... it's as much about the older son as the younger, and it's as much about the father as either of the sons.

It could as well be called the Parable of the lost sons (for, as we shall see, you can be just as lost on the family estate as in the far off country ...); or indeed, given that 'prodigal' means 'wasteful' ... as we see the father's amazing grace, love and forgiveness poured out, we might want to rename it 'The Prodigal Father'.

I have 3 key questions for you from this Parable:

- what is your relationship with God the father?
- do you know the forgiveness of the Father which covered your squalor; restored your status; and assured you of your place ...?
- what does *your* forgiveness look like?

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THE FATHER?

In Luke 15, Jesus points us to a number of possibilities ...

- son
- hired hand
- slave

As we will see, these represent a number of 'spirits' in which we can relate to God ...

Son

¹¹ *Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons ...*

huios (hwee-os') –

- a son (by birth or adoption); (figuratively) anyone sharing the same nature as their Father
- emphasizes likeness of the son to the Father, i.e. resembling His character
- highlights the (legal) right to the Father's inheritance

If a son, to whom?

¹⁵ *So he [the younger son] went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.*

kolláō (kol-lah'-o) (from kólla, "glue") – to bond (cleave), adhere to (literally, "glued together"); to cleave, join to; (figuratively) intimately connected in a soul-knit friendship.

It seems that when we do not, can not or will not relate spiritually to the Father who gave us life, we will 'bond' with a surrogate Father-figure.

Hired servant

*¹⁷ 'When he [the younger son] came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's **hired servants** have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!*

misthios (mis'-thee-os) – a paid worker, hired servant, hireling (contrasted with a slave).

Slave

*²⁹ But he [the older son] answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been **slaving** for you and never disobeyed your orders.*

douleúo (dool-yoo'-o) – to serve as a slave, having all personal ownership-rights assigned to the owner; (figuratively) to willingly give over the prerogative to be self-governing.

It's a sobering fact that more people in our churches relate to the older son than to the younger son ...

So which do you feel yourself to be?

- Slave
- Hired worker
- Son (and if son, are you bonded to the right father)?

WHAT DOES YOUR FORGIVENESS LOOK LIKE?

the older brother ...?

A picture of simmering resentment – unforgiveness, bitterness

'... this son of yours ...'

Like everyone who withholds forgiveness, he is locked in a prison of his own making.

If you struggle with forgiveness, work through my study sheet 'Forgiveness: what the Bible teaches', available from the website or from your small group leader.

... or the Father ...?

It's the Father who models forgiveness

- His younger son had effectively wished him dead, out of his life, independence etc.
- The break-up of the Estate
- The agony he'd put his parents through ...

The Father spends his days watching, waiting ...

‘filled with compassion ...’

The father runs, embraces, kisses ... for a man of any age to run in the Ancient Near East was to bring disgrace upon himself. It was considered one of the most undignified things he could do. From this Father as an image of our heavenly father, we learn that

- God is more concerned with your restoration than with his reputation
- God’s desire for relationship with you is stronger than anything you can do to destroy that relationship

And I particularly like the fact that Father God has no patience for liturgy ... at least not in this context ... what about you? Do you ‘run’ to forgive, cutting off the embarrassed, stumbling phrases the other person has prepared? Or do you take a perverse pleasure in extracting the maximum ‘squirm’ from them?

The younger son doesn’t manage more than one sentence of his carefully prepared speech ... before his father is ‘re-dressing’ him in

- Robe
- Ring
- Sandals

All symbols of sonship and authority ... but more than that: the Father’s forgiveness

- Covers his son’s squalor and mess (the robe)
- Restores the son’s status (the ring)
- Assures him of his place in the family (the sandals: servants went barefoot, family wore shoes)

His squalor covered ... his status restored ... his place assured ...

Firstly, do you know that level of forgiveness from God the Father?

Heaven throws a party when a sinner comes home ... Jesus spoke of the angels rejoicing over a sinner who repents. This story tells us why – because it’s what the Father does ...

Secondly, what does your forgiveness look like?

- when someone comes to you seeking forgiveness, are they aware of you running towards them? Or is it hard work from the start?
- does your forgiveness cover the mess they’ve made, the wrong they’ve done?
- does your forgiveness restore their status – or leave them feeling a little bit lower as a result?
- does your forgiveness assure them of their place in relation to you – or are things always a little strained from then on?

If you need or want to do more work on your own journey of forgiveness, start with the Lord’s prayer – and the word Jesus says immediately after it in Matthew’s gospel:

⁹ *This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

¹⁰ *your kingdom come,
your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

(Matthew 6)

Then work through my sheet: ‘Forgiveness: what the Bible teaches’

Paul Langham, November 2017