

Glen Park Gospel Church  
**Tuesday Evening Bible Study Group Notes**

Rev Chris Trinham

Stories Jesus Told

No 5

## A Tale of Two Brothers.

Scripture Reading: Luke 15.

This chapter shows us one method Jesus employed in reaching the lost: he associated with them, shared their table and their conversation. He built up a relationship and gained their trust. This is something we ought to be doing in order to share our love of the Lord with the lost; the sheep, and securities and sons of our day, the people we love and know.

### Jesus Told These Parables for the Scribes and Pharisees

Jesus pointed the first parable at the discontent of the Pharisees (including the scribes): They were offended because Jesus was associating with the outcasts of Israel. Verse 3 more literally reads "So he told this parable against them saying ...".<sup>1</sup> (In the following two parables He expanded this main objective.)

### Two Lost Brothers

This third parable contrasts the values and attitudes of the Pharisees with that of a father's love. What a stark difference between desires of heaven and that of the Pharisees. The story is heavy with meaning for learned Jewish hearers.

The Jewish custom of inheritance at that time required that the elder brother receive two thirds of the movable property, the younger children shared the remaining third of movable assets. This normally fell due on the father's death.<sup>2</sup>

It was from this lesser share that the younger brother appealed for an early release of funds, which he had no right to claim. He knew that he would have to make his own way in life, but more than that he wanted some fun.

Consider the young man's lack of his father's values:

He was anxious to be free of parental restraint.  
He did not offer thanks or show gratitude.  
He did not appreciate or reciprocate parental love.  
He did not respect the heritage and tradition in which he had been reared.  
He had instead, a sensual appetite.

We can, then, imagine the unease felt by the father as he handed to his son his inheritance.

A far away country, far removed from parental constraint: this story has been re-enacted many times over.

'Squandered' or 'wasted' v13 is from a word to

'disperse or scatter'. What he gathered in he now scattered in reckless debauchery. His undoing was his recklessness rather than his debauchery, as he had no resources to meet the inevitable recession. The only work he could get was tending swine and he longed to eat the pig food, carob pods, but the people wouldn't even spare him that.

Luke employs the name for the Cretonia siliqua tree which produces pods yielding a sweet pulp and bean like seeds, only ever eaten by the very poorest people or more often animals. A starvation diet.

What a miserable predicament for a Jew, but their prohibition was against owning pigs rather than feeding them.

'When he came to his senses' v17 is actually 'when he came to himself'. Spurgeon said of this phrase, "If he came to himself he must have been beside himself!" That was well put. When he came to himself, he also came to God. See v 18. There is nothing like starving beside a pig trough to make men look life in the eye, perhaps for the first time. Adversity prevails when admonition fails, no matter how well it is meant. Remember John Newton.

There is a Jewish Saying:

When Israel is reduced to the carob tree they become repentant.<sup>2</sup>

### Our Father in Heaven

'I have sinned against heaven and against you' v18 There are always two dimensions to the injury of our sin. 'Against heaven' in this context means 'against God'. God stands as judge to the rebellious sinner, but a welcoming father to the repentant sinner. In this father we see typified, the fatherhood of God.

'When he was a long way off his father saw him' v20 His father was ever longing and looking for his son.

'He ran to his son' embraced and kissed him.

God is not looking for servants. He has myriads upon myriads of angels to serve Him. He longs for the penitent return of his children so that He may lavish upon them the bounty of their privilege and enjoy the blessing of their company in His fields.

The robe was the *stole*, a long flowing garment Mark 12:38, the first or outer one, a dignitary's garment, not a slave's attire. A ring was the symbol of authority and the sandals were what a free man would wear. Our father honours us as sons when we come to Him through Jesus Christ. See John 1:12. This verse is expanded in this parable.

### The Pharisees Stood by Murmuring

When the elder son came in from the field he heard the orchestra. The word for 'music' is the word 'symphony', music for grouped instruments. And 'dance' is to dance to music in the Eastern style. It was no small celebration. At all this he was bitter.

*Hear his boasting.* Look! For many years I have slaved for you and never disregarded your instructions v29.

*Taste his bitterness.* Yet you never gave me a party with my friends, not even a barbecued goat.

*Acknowledge his blame.* It is evident from the words in verse 30 that the misdeeds of the younger son were the talk of the country. Without knowing of his return the older son, he already knew of his reputation. His brother had brought shame on the family by his actions. The elder sought to distance himself from those even now, 'But when this son of yours . . . comes home ...' He did not say, 'my brother.'

There are nine Greek words used in the NT to describe children and the brother used one which indicates heredity. 'He is your son - you are responsible.' The father used of him another word for child which stressed their birth relationship, 'My child.' It was a loving response without rebuke. Both the sons were his children. He came out to his 'lost' elder son and showed the same tender affection.

But, there is no record of his softening.

Hear the words of the father to the older brother in his sullen aloofness v31:

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'

This was true for the Pharisees. Paul wrote of Israel Romans 9:4&5:

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

The problem with the Pharisees was that they believed that God's favour was earned by obedience and servitude in the form they authorised rather than as a gift freely given by the good grace of God through our humble confession and His loving forgiveness. They just did not see it and thus they missed out.

There is a contra parable found in old rabbinic works of a son of a friend who is redeemed from bondage, not as a son, but as a slave so that obedience might be demanded of him. The inference is not filial love of the pardoned but the enforcement of the claim of the master<sup>2</sup>

Our sin may be forgiven by God because He sent His Son, Jesus, to pay its penalty.

Those who trust Him are freely forgiven and accepted into the Father's affection as sons. For one reason or another the Pharisees, like so many, just do not see it and so miss out. Do you see it? If so simply accept it. This is the prayer God longs to hear:

'Father, thank you.'

Acknowledgements: 1. The word 'pros' in v3, when accusative, means 'to, toward, with, in order to or against' It is omitted in most English versions, but more literally reads, 'So Jesus told this parable against them.' 2. Alfred Edersheim, The Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah. 3. Bible references are from the NIV, unless otherwise acknowledged. Some are free translations used to expand word meanings.

# Welcome

Glen Park Gospel Church

Lower Road, Eltham North

Sundays 10.30 am

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