

# A Father and His Two Rebellious Sons

*Luke 15:11-32*

Many years ago a Spanish father and his teenage son, Paco, were at odds with one another. The relationship became so strained that the son ran away from home. But the father would not give up on his son, so he went looking for him without success. He had looked everywhere he could think of but there was no trace of him.

In a last desperate attempt to find his son, the father put an ad in the local paper in Madrid, Spain. The ad read, "Dear Paco, Meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father."

The next day in front of the newspaper office, 800 Pacos showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness. They were all seeking the love of their father.

This morning we want to look at the story of 2 Pacos – two sons who rebelled against their father & needed forgiveness. Two sons who had a father more than willing to forgive. We know this parable as the 'Prodigal Son' but Jesus never said that. Jesus says its about the father, "There was **a man** who had two sons." The parable does not end with the forgiveness of the younger son but ends us questioning what happened to him?

What's the context of the parable? Jesus has been preaching about accepting God's invitation to His Kingdom to join in the eternal banquet (14:15-24). The self-righteous Jewish leaders thought that they were shoe-ins. But Jesus pointed out that they were not those who followed God's Word. They snubbed the poor, lame, crippled & blind. Even though they said 'yes' with their lips they'll live for God, they show by their actions that they live for themselves. Jesus then says if you want to be my disciple you must put me ahead of your possessions, your own plans and agendas and even your closest relationships. If you don't you cannot be my disciple. The chapter ends with Jesus saying 'He who has ears to hear let him hear.' Then 15:1 begins "Now the tax-collectors and sinners were all gathering around to HEAR him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

The parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son are all in response to the failure of the Pharisees to accept grace and forgiveness. Instead of rejoicing in how God was working in sinner's lives who were becoming disciples of Jesus, they grumbled about the type of people coming to Jesus.

The first 2 parables set us up for the 3rd. Of course a shepherd will look for a lost sheep. Of course a woman will look for a lost coin. They are valuable to them. Of course they will celebrate with their friends that what was lost is now found. The parable of the lost sons should end with 'of course all the family and friends will rejoice when a lost son comes home' but it doesn't. Instead Jesus uses the parable to expose the selfish and rebellious attitudes of those who fail to join God in the work that He's doing. And the parable also confronts us about our own mini-rebellion against God, when we fail to join Him in His work and complain about how He's working.

Are you and I rebelling against God? How might be rebelling against God? Well, the parable points that there are 2 kinds of rebels:

## **The Rebel on the Run & The Rebel under the Roof**

The rebel on the run is the younger son. His rebellion is **Outward**. How many of us would dare to go up to our fathers and say 'Drop dead dad, so I can get on with my life!' Hopefully none of us - but that's exactly what this son said to his father when he demands his father to give him his inheritance right then and there. We need to listen with Jewish ears.

Inheritances were only distributed at death or on one's death-bed. The oldest son always received a double blessing. So here the younger son asks for his 1/3 inheritance and then shows his disrespect for his father's name by selling it all and turning it into liquid assets that bear no trace of his father's or family's name. Total disregard for his family and everything his father had built up for them. He wants nothing to do with his father and his only desire is to live disconnected from his dad.

A rebel on the run is one who has turned his back on God and says, 'I'm doing things my way and I'm going to live as if you didn't exist.'

The other brother is the rebel under the roof. His rebellion is **Inward**. How do we know? Remember, the parable is about a father and his 2 sons. In order to give the younger son his inheritance, he must give the older son his double portion (15:11). In that culture it was the older brother's responsibility to reconcile father and younger brother. He makes no attempt. His silence to the Jewish listening audience is alarming and means he agrees with the younger brother; 'Yeah I'll take my inheritance now too dad.' Neither son has a good relationship with their father. One outwardly rejects him, the other silently rejects him. He may still be at home. He may still do his work. He may not say what he's thinking, but he wants out from under dad's authority as well. The listening audience would be shocked at the younger brother's insolence AND at the older brother's silence.

They would be even more shocked at the father's reaction. Ken Bailey spent years in the middle east studying the cultural backgrounds of Israel and other Asian cultures which still carry many of the same customs that they did in Jesus' day. He asked many people what would happen if a living son asked his father for his inheritance now. To which they all replied, 'His father would beat him.' "Why?" "Because he told him he wanted him to die."

Yet how does the Father respond? He lets him go. Absolutely unheard of. One of the most difficult things to do as parents is to watch our children make their own mistakes. As they get older the mistakes can get bigger. We can warn them and tell them the consequences, but they still have to decide just as we have to make decisions for our lives as well.

The younger brother is looking for life and happiness on his terms - just like most of the world. And so many have to lose everything before they can see that the Father in heaven has the plan for true and meaningful life. He loses all his money and then there's a famine. Rather than go home and swallow his pride he goes to work for a gentile pig farmer - for a Jew that shows how far away from God he is also. And the farmer doesn't even feed him properly hoping this Jew will go home. Instead he "attaches" himself to the citizen in the far country.

The rebel on the run "comes to his senses." He makes the first important step to reconciliation:

### ***He recognizes his sin (v.17)***

He realizes that being a servant back home is better than this. He sees how foolish he's been and starts to make plans to go home. Its one thing to recognize our sin, its another to actually

### ***Repent of our sin (vv.18-19)***

Repent means to confess our sin to God and turn our life 180° back to God. We hear him rehearse his confession: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven [a respectful reference to God's name; heaven often used in place of the name] and against you.' Sin is always against God first. Anyone who says they keep all the commandments lies because the first one says I will put no other gods before God. Whenever we sin we've put someone/thing ahead of God.

He realizes he has cut himself off from the father and hopes to latch on as a servant. That way he can pay back his debt. That's the biblical model prescribed in the OT. If someone had sinned against another by stealing or cheating, he must pay full restitution plus 20% (Lev. 5:16) was the price that had to be paid back. He's willing to try. So he . . .

### ***Returns for forgiveness (v.20a)***

We have to understand the Jewish setting. This son has done the unthinkable. Jewish communities were very close. The community would have known. If they saw him come back they would have mocked him, shamed him and possibly even beat him up. At the very least refuse to let him back in the community. The son knows all this. He is humbling himself before the community and his family to repent and seek forgiveness.

It's hard isn't it; to humble ourselves to ask forgiveness. It's so hard that I think most of us don't do it. We only repent inwardly. We say we won't do it again. We'll ignore the offended person hoping they'll forget. Or we just won't bring it up. And as a result we live in self-made prisons of guilt refusing to humble ourselves in order to live in the freedom of grace and forgive-ness. The younger son does and is ...

### ***Received back by the Father (vv.20b-21)***

Forgiveness is risky. But it's our responsibility to seek forgiveness and to forgive others. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18). We are not responsible for other's reactions only for our repentance. Repentance brings freedom. Rebellion brings guilt. And we know from experience when we have asked for forgiveness we were almost always forgiven by the person we hurt.

The father sees the son coming. He knows what the community is going to do to his son. He runs out of love to shield his son from the torrent of abuse from the community and sending a clear message to the community that he has forgiven his son. Not only is he received but there is . . .

### ***Rejoicing at his return (vv.22-24)***

The father calls for the best robe [reserved for special guests], a ring [a father's ring showing he has his father's authority and the right to purchase - like a credit card] and sandals [sign of a son, not a servant]. he asks that the fattened calf, which are reserved for special feasts, be killed for his son. The calf means lots of guests which means he's going to invite the community to celebrate the fact that his son who was considered dead is alive. He was lost but now has been found. And they all lived happily ever after. The End.

But the story isn't over just yet. There's another rebel. The older son who remained under the father's roof. Jesus, in his telling of the older brother's response now **reverses** the steps of the younger son in order to demonstrate the differences in attitudes between the two. Whereas the father & household rejoiced at his return he ...

### ***Refuses to rejoice (vv.25-28a)***

While out working in the fields he hears music and dancing and asks a nearby servant 'What's up?' "The younger brother has returned safe and sound." Instead of entering like a son he remains outside like a stranger. It was the older brother's responsibility to host a party. He was to have rejoiced with the family. If he didn't like something he would wait until after the party and discuss it privately with dad. But he "became angry and refused to come in." Did he have a right to feel angry? Did his father favour the younger over the older? No. He too is

### ***Received by the father (v.28b)***

Note that the Father's behaviour and treatment is consistent. He has been mistreated and humiliated by his younger son. Yet, he graciously receives him back, welcoming him as a son rather than the slave he was willing to be. God doesn't forgive us to restore us only to servitude but to sonship because we are his children.

Now the father is humiliated in public by the older son. Again he humbles himself and graciously pleads with the son to welcome and rejoice in the return of his brother. He treats each one the same; with grace and mercy. His love is boundless and desires to reach out to all, just as God's love is boundless and desires to welcome all sinners who repent (whether its the first time for salvation, or after we've confessed our rebellion and returned home again & again . . .). But instead of accepting his brother's forgiveness he . . .

### ***Resents forgiveness (vv.29-30)***

The older brother is the legalist. He looks at his relationship with his father based on performance. He sees himself as only a slave to his father. Resentment comes from comparison. Look at what I've done compared to what he's done! It's not fair! Claims to have never broken a command his father gave him. Yet isn't he disobeying God's command to honor his father? He accuses his father of favouritism because his dad never gave him a goat to celebrate with his friends. The word "me" is the first word in the sentence because that's where his focus is on. When we only focus on ourselves and compare ourselves with others, the sin of resentment will fill our hearts.

It can easily happen to us when we think God is treating us unfairly. When we see one of our children not walking with God whereas our friend's children are. When sickness, injury and even death comes to our homes but not to others. When someone else's unsaved spouse accepts the Lord but yours has not. When your bills keep piling up and your friend seems not to have those problems. When other's ministries seem to be more successful or more people seem to be getting saved and growing at a different church.

Comparison is a grace-killer. It hinders our relationships with God and each other by faith. God says in Hebrews 12:2

*"Let us throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us and let us run the race marked out for us, [not someone else's race] fixing our eyes on Jesus [not on other people]."*

Dad lovingly confronts him - in essence pleading with him to

### ***Recognize [your] sin (vv.31-32)***

He points out the blessings that he has had. 'You've always been with me. What's mine has always been yours, just as your brother. I love you both. I'll do anything for both of you. You are my

sons not my slaves! We had to celebrate! We thought he was dead, but he's not. We thought we had lost him but he came home! What you are saying is not true and you need to see what is true. Recognize your own sin & repent.

Jesus leaves us hanging asking the question . . .

### ***Did he repent?***

Like the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin, the father says to the older son "Rejoice with me, we have found our lost son." It appears he doesn't. He can't accept grace and forgiveness. He can't accept that his brother can have his sonship restored just by asking forgiveness. Which is exactly what the religious leaders were doing to the tax-collectors and sinners. They refused to rejoice when they repented of their sins. They refused to accept grace for themselves so they couldn't accept it for others.

The parable doesn't just expose the religious leaders attitudes, its meant to cause us to examine our own hearts. We need to ask ourselves . . .

### ***Are we rebelling against God in any way?***

Maybe you can identify with the rebel on the run. One who has turned his back on God and says, 'I'm doing things my way and I'm going to live as if God doesn't exist.' Maybe you accepted Christ as your Saviour at one time, but you've never followed through on your commitment. Maybe you didn't count the cost that Jesus warned about in Luke 14. You put other relationships, your own agenda and the pursuit of the possessions of the world over God.

If that's describing you this morning you need to confess your sin, repent and return to your heavenly father. He's waiting to forgive you, but He's also waiting for you to make the first step. In James 4:10 God says, "*Draw near to Me and I'll draw near to you.*" If you've never accepted Christ then come home to the Father and become one of His children. If you have and you've ran away, return home and be restored through forgiveness. Feel His love reaching out to you.

All of us have to admit we're sometimes guilty of inward rebellion. Rebelling through resentment, comparison, accusing God of being unfair, telling ourselves we're obeying God's Word when we really haven't. As His disciples we must follow Him and obey His Word. We must not deceive ourselves by only hearing what Jesus says we must be doers of the Word. (James 1:22).

How might we rebelling against God? What sin have we refused to confess? What have we gotten angry about?

### ***Are we rejoicing more than grumbling about the way God is working?***

Paul begins most letters praying for them to grow in grace, mercy and peace. To grow in **grace** means to recognize the many blessings and the way God is working in everyone's life, not just our own. To grow in **mercy** means to be thankful in seeing how much God has spared us and how we need to treat others with mercy who have mistreated us unmercifully. To grow in **peace** is to live by faith trusting all situations in our life and others to God. He is sovereign. He's in control. The religious leaders wouldn't accept God's grace towards sinners and tax-collectors. They refused to be merciful to them. Therefore they had no peace.

The challenge for us is to be like the Father. To graciously forgive even if we have been mistreated, insulted and abused. To humble ourselves in love to reach out to everyone equally so we can see how God works around us and through us.

The author of Hebrews warned his readers 3 x in Ch. 3-4 quoting Ps. 95:7-8; "Today if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts ..."

Are you and I rebelling against God today? Will we have ears to hear and recognize our sin, repent and return to God or will we harden our hearts again and drift further into the far country away from God? As the author of Hebrews warned his audience, he spoke of hope as well.

"Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case - things that accompany salvation (6:9)."

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us  
at [olivvet@rideau.net](mailto:olivvet@rideau.net)