

# Upside-Down Kingdom (7)- A Man Had Two Sons

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(Luke 15:11-32)

## I. Introduction

- A. My sister and I have ongoing debate about who my parents loved the best
  - 1. Each of us thinks they loved the other more, and we have facts to prove
    - a. They let her (not me) drive Dad's '72 Pontiac LeMans 454 V-8
    - b. They let me (not her) go out without curfew or calling to check in
  - 2. Truth is that they loved us the same... they just trusted us differently
    - a. They trusted me to go where I said, only where I said and when I said
    - b. But they didn't trust me to go there in a car that would go 140 mph!
  - 3. So they really loved us both the same, which is to say with all their heart
- B. Parents who show favoritism to one child do great harm to all their children
  - 1. The story of the family of Isaac and Jacob illustrate danger of partiality
    - a. Isaac loved Esau while Rebekah's favorite was Jacob (**Gen 25:28**)
    - b. Result was that Jacob and Esau spent much of their lives as enemies
      - 1) That was passed on to next generation; Jacob's favorite = Joseph
      - 2) Result was the same; Joseph's brothers decided to kill (sell) him
  - 2. This favoritism of one child is forbidden in the Law (**Deut 21:15-17**)
    - a. This has to do with inheritance rights; it's hard to legislate affection
    - b. But father could not more inheritance rights to the child he favored
- C. The parable that we look at today concerns a father who had two sons
  - 1. Each of the sons perhaps thought that the **other** was the favored son
    - a. In reality, the father loves both boys; both are shown acts of grace
    - b. That grace is seen differently because of different situation of the two
  - 2. The *Parable of the Prodigal Son* is perhaps the best known of parables
    - a. The word "*prodigal*" means "*extravagantly wasteful*" or "*spendthrift*"
      - 1) That's generally not what we mean when we use the term
      - 2) We use "*prodigal*" for someone who has been gone and returns
    - b. Actually, this parable is about two prodigal sons, one never leaves
  - 3. But in reality, the parable is the story of a father who forgives

## II. Man Had Two Sons: Parable (Reading: Luke 15:11-24)

- A. This is 3<sup>rd</sup> in series of parables about lost things—sheep, coin, prodigal son
1. Jesus tells them in response to criticism of eating with sinners (**15:1-2**)
    - a. “*Sinner*” is used as technical expression (“*irreligious Jews*” NAS note)
      - 1) The people aren’t sinners in the sense of “*Hey, nobody’s perfect*”
      - 2) They are sinners as in “*reprobate scum*” (“notorious sinners” NLT)
    - b. We know that drug dealers and child molesters are SINNERS, right.
    - c. Well, Pharisees were even surer that these tax collectors were sinners!
  2. They can’t understand why a Rabbi would eat with such “*outcasts*” (TEV)
    - a. In OT, one became **ceremonially** unclean thru contact with unclean
    - b. For example, became unclean if you touched corpse (**Num 19:11**)
    - c. Pharisees applied this to actual sin—lay down with dogs, get fleas!
  3. This same question had come up earlier in Luke (**Luke 5:30-32**)
    - a. Jesus came to call sinners; hard to call them without speaking to them
    - b. Parable of prodigal son answers their question from God’s perspective
- B. The prodigal son is familiar story, though it is hard to see it as realistic
1. A man has two sons; the younger is too impatient to wait for father to die
    - a. He asks for his inheritance, and receives it (*that part hard to imagine*)
    - b. He goes to a far country and wastes all his money (*easier to imagine*)
    - c. He ends up destitute, feeding pigs—more than destitute for a Jew
  2. In the pigpen, he finally comes to his senses (lit, “*came to himself*”)
    - a. He repents and decides to return home to his father and repent
      - 1) He no longer has an inheritance, so he does not deserve to be a son
      - 2) Instead he will ask to be one of father’s servants (“*day laborer*”)
    - b. His father saw him “*while a long way off.*” He was watching for him
      - 1) Men in polite society never ran; that was considered undignified
      - 2) But heartsick and worried father do run, and he ran to his son
    - c. He greets boy with hugs-n-kisses (*not pleasant for one from pig sty*)
      - 1) The boy begins his speech, but is interrupted by invitation to party
      - 2) All are invited to rejoice for the son who “*was lost and is found*”
  3. Only ones not glad for the boys return is older brother and the fatted calf!

- C. The father is accused of favoritism by the older brother (**Luke 15:25-32**)
1. Comedian Red Buttons' routine about people who "*Never got a dinner*"
    - a. Son complains that he never got a dinner! *Father shows favoritism!*
    - b. He calls prodigal "*son of yours*" and accuses of using "*prostitutes*"
    - c. He is unloving and judgmental, just like the Pharisees he represents
  2. Father doesn't show favoritism to either son; he shows **GRACE** to both!
    - a. At the beginning, He divides his wealth— *Father gives good gifts*
    - b. In the middle of story, he waits for his lost son— *Father seeks lost*
    - c. He is gracious to prodigal, and he is patient with the older son
- D. We call this "*prodigal son.*" Some suggests it's the parable of the older son
1. In reality, the parable isn't about either son—*it's about the Father*
    - a. It is the Father who loves, forgives and is patient with both sons.
    - b. The Father runs to the prodigal; Father is patient with older brother
  2. Both sons reject the father's graciousness, but they reject it *differently*
    - a. The younger son in the beginning **abuses** his father's graciousness
      - 1) He sees his father as nothing but a meal ticket and inheritance
      - 2) Takes his father's stuff, but rejects his father's values and his love
    - b. The older son **refuses** his father's graciousness and his love
      - 1) He earned his inheritance through his hard work; he deserved it.
      - 2) He resents that his father would be gracious to the prodigal son.
- E. Tim Woodroof suggests parable would be easier if it had a **third brother**
1. This **3<sup>rd</sup> son** would be more **obedient** and **faithful** than younger brother
    - a. He would receive father's gifts with gratitude, and not waste them
    - b. Father's love would lead him, not to a far country, but to the father
  2. We need **3<sup>rd</sup> son** more **forgiving** and **understanding** than older brother
    - a. He would see the blessings he received, not the goat he didn't receive
    - b. He would love and forgive because the Father loved and forgave
  3. Why doesn't Jesus have a third son? Such sons are few-n-far between!
    - a. Jesus tells parables, not tell fairy tales! Imperfection is the point!
    - b. Father is patient and forgiving with both of his prodigal sons
    - c. Point of the story isn't the sons at all—this is all about the Father.

### III. Conclusion

- A. But wouldn't this parable be more realistic if the Father wasn't so nice?
  - 1. What would Dad say if I asked for my share of the inheritance now?
    - a. Daddy Lecture #101 would be realistic, "*As long as under my roof...*"
    - b. And how did the father deal party-pooper older brother? *Too easy!*
  - 2. That's the point of the story; *God forgives and rejoices when He does so*
    - a. God is a God who delights when he can show mercy (**Micah 7:18**)
    - b. All three parables end with a party to celebrate when lost is found
    - c. God welcomes sinner who repent; God is still calling the prodigal!
  - 3. God doesn't forgive only if we make the right speech or toe the right line
    - a. God runs to meet prodigals; He doesn't even wait for the speech
      - 1) Sure, we must repent and come to senses like prodigal in pig-pen
      - 2) Salvation must be accepted; fruit of repentance must be real
    - b. Point of parable is God jumps (or runs) at the chance to forgive!
- B. The two sons in the parable represent **two extreme** reactions to God's grace
  - 1. In the beginning of the story, the prodigal son was a GRACE ABUSER
    - a. He had the freedom to do exactly what he was going to do
      - 1) He didn't care about his father's values or his father love
      - 2) He cared about father's money and his freedom to do as we wants
    - b. GRACE ABUSERS today see God's forgiveness as license (**Rom 6:1**)
  - 2. The older brother in the parable stood as a GRACE REFUSER
    - a. The older brother saw himself—his status and his service
      - 1) He looked at his brother in unloving, judgmental condemnation
      - 2) Didn't see Father's forgiveness because didn't see Father's love
    - b. Pharisees were GRACE-REFUSER with room for sinner. *And today?*
      - 1) I preached a sermon that suggested God can forgive sin of divorce
      - 2) Someone said, "*Preach that and the church will be full of sinners*"
  - 3. What this parable teaches is that God is a God who forgives and rejoices
    - a. We have to come to ourselves—can't sty in the pig pen of our sin
    - b. If we will repent and come home to Father, he will forgive & rejoice
  - 4. God is calling the prodigal, come without delay!