



Part 1: Reckless Grace for Sinners

Luke 15:1-2, 11-24

Jesus demonstrates that the Father is reckless in His grace towards sinners.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy

Q – What is God like? The wrong answer to this question will have disastrous consequences for your life! Jesus’ greatest conflicts were with the religious leaders (vs. 1-2). Their incorrect knowledge of God led them to conspire to have Jesus killed!

The parable of the two sons is most famously known as the parable of the prodigal son, but it’s really a parable to illustrate the character of the Father.

THE FATHER’S RECKLESS GRACE FOR SINNERS

Prodigal = Recklessly Extravagant

Prod-i-gal/ adjective

- Recklessly extravagant
- Having spent everything

“The Father’s welcome to the repentant son was literally reckless, because he refused to ‘reckon’ or count his sin against him or demand repayment. This response offended the elder son and most likely the local community.” Tim Keller, Prodigal God

“Jesus is showing us the God of Great Expenditure ...God’s reckless grace is our greatest hope, a life-changing experience” Tim Keller, Prodigal God

Breaking Relationship for Autonomy (vs. 11-12)

NT scholar Kenneth Bailey (Lebanon) asks people in the East the implications of the son's request for his inheritance while the father is still living. The conversation always went as follows:

"Has anyone ever made such a request in your village?"

"Never!"

"Could anyone ever make such a request?"

"Impossible!"

"If anyone ever did, what would happen?"

"His father would beat him, of course!"

"Why?"

"This request means he wants his father to die!"

Bailey: There is no law or custom among the Jews or Arabs which entitles a son to a share of the father's wealth while the father is still alive.

The son's request shows a profound break in relationship. The son wants his autonomy from the father, and he's willing to reject his father for that autonomy.

The son's request is also a break in relationship with his local community as they will see a rejection of the father as a rejection of them too.

"For in the truest sense, the fall into sin was a fall out of relationship. It was the fall out of a secure place of belonging with God and into a self-absorbed isolation and inner emptiness." Sandra Wilson, Into Abba's Arms

Famines: The Gift of Hitting Bottom (vs. 13-20)

The son gradually descends into his own hell...

- Hired himself to a Gentile to feed pigs (unthinkable for a Jew); pride not yet broken
- Starvation leads him to find a solution – "when he came to his senses"
- Note: thank God for the "famines" in our lives that wake us up
- Devises a plan to return to his father as a hired servant – pay his father back
- The son embodies the rabbinic idea of repentance = meet God ½ way, a work of man to earn God's favor = save yourself!

The Father's Reckless Grace (vs. 20-24)

"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 around him and kissed him." v. 20

- The father does the unthinkable and shameful in his culture – a nobleman would never run (too humiliating).

"A man's manner of walking tells us what he is." Ben Sirac

“Great men never run in public.” Aristotle

Q – Why is he running to his son? Aware of the community’s response, his actions protect the son and restore relationship.

The father’s actions represent the son’s full restoration to the father and the community – he is a trusted son again; there is great joy and celebration for the community.

In place of total rejection by the son, there is total acceptance by the father.

SLAVE, ORPHAN, OR BELOVED CHILD

In the famine, the son began to see his sin (vs. 18-19). But he could not see the full depth of his sin until he experienced the Father’s reckless grace (v. 21).

There are three ways to live our lives ... Our knowledge of God will determine which way we live.

Psalm 103...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sin against them.” 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Jesus demonstrates that the Father is reckless in His grace towards sinners.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What has been your experience with this parable? Are you surprised to hear it is really about God the Father? Does this make sense in light of verses 1-2?
- Given the cultural background of this parable, what strikes you most about the points Jesus is making about God? What about the rabbinic understanding of repentance verse the Gospel understanding of repentance?
- How does this parable encourage or challenge you?