

Sharing the Father's Welcome

Lk 15:1-3 & 11-32 (text: 15:1-3, 25-32)

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 5 May 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The whole reason why our Lord Jesus told these three parables – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son – was to teach two things:

- Firstly, to teach the Pharisees why He (Jesus) came, i.e. to poignantly show *the Father's welcoming* of repentant sinners! That's the first reason – pressing upon them the *Father's welcoming* of repentant sinners!
- Here's the second reason: to prompt the Pharisees & scribes (and all who are like-minded) to share *the Father's welcoming* of repentant sinners!

Well, this morning, our sermon dealt with the *first* of these two themes: The *Father's* welcoming of repentant sinners.

But this afternoon, we want to focus on the *second* theme: *Sharing* the Father's welcoming of repentant sinners.

So, here, then is the main message of our sermon: Christian, do you know of anyone who's in need of salvation? Do you even know of a brother/sister who, after many years of sinful living, has taken the first steps back to the Lord (& to the church)? **Well, then why not share the Father's welcome with that soul!?**

Here are three points by which we will expound this message:

- A Son Returns
- A Father Welcomes
- A Brother Shares the Father's Welcome

A Son Returns

This morning's sermon focused chiefly on the prodigal, his repentance, and his father's welcoming of him!

You will remember how the prodigal reached rock-bottom there in the pigsty, when all his money was up and he was humiliated and hungry!

You will remember how *he came to himself*, but not *by* himself – yes, this downward spiral in his life was allowed by the heavenly Father down to the lowest point in this young man's life, the point where he was ready to hear the voice of God!

You will also remember how he, even though he stunk and was in rags and with no good shoes on his feet, nevertheless tackled the long journey back to his father!

Yes, you will remember how this man's desperation for his father was one notch higher than his dignity!¹

Well, here's now a question: In that scene where Jesus was eating with sinners & tax collectors – and where the Pharisees were blaming Him for that – whom in that real-life scene did the lost son represent? Yes, who in that real-life scene should we identify with the lost son?

Well, the answer is not hard, for look, is it not *the tax collectors and sinners* who are represented by the lost son – and the lost sheep, and the lost coin?

¹ Words borrowed from Lucado, M. 2004. Six hours one Friday. Nashville, Dallas : Thomas Nelson. p.110)

Of course, it is! Thus, in seeing the lost son, you & I should envisage tax collectors & sinners!

But, now, let's bring it more home to us and our times: Who in our life-circles are the lost son (sheep & coin)?

Look is it not all who need the Saviour? Yes, is it not perhaps your/my next-door neighbour? Is it not the "write-offs" of society? And is it not also the brother & sister who, after having wandered away from the Lord for months & years, have now just started to take the first steps of coming back to the Lord and to the church? Yes, are not *they* that prodigal now returning!?

Well, that's point 1 – A Son Returns.

Here's point 2...

A Father Welcomes

Well, from this morning's sermon, you will remember how the father, from the farmhouse, saw his son coming while he was still far in the distance... and how the father's heart went out (was moved)² for his son!

You will remember how the father then did the unorthodox thing for that culture, i.e. to pick up his garment, fasten it tightly with his belt, and to start running towards his long-lost son!³

You will remember how the father then fell on his son's neck and kissed him with gusto;⁴ and how the father did not even allow for the son to finish all that he had planned to say! Of course, it was not needed for the son to say more than he had said, for, look, was not the son's homecoming in itself already vividly portraying his repentance!?⁵

Well, you will remember how the father then ordered a servant to go get the best robe so that his son would not enter the house in clothes not worthy of his father's home!

You will also remember how the father ordered the slave to bring a ring for his finger and shoes for his feet; how the father then ordered the servant, saying as much as, "Servant, you know that calf which we have fattened and kept for some or other great occasion?" "Well, that great occasion (the best occasion) has now arrived!" "So, go slaughter that fattened calf, **for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.**"⁶

And then, they celebrated, ate and made music and danced!

My brother & sister, see? See the father's welcoming of his repentant son!?

Well, here's again a question: For Christ's first audience, who is to be identified with the *father* of the prodigal? And who, for you & me, is to be identified with the prodigal's *father*?

It's easy! Isn't it our Heavenly Father!?

And is He not welcoming tax collectors & sinners? Is it not your/my lost next-door neighbour? Is it not the young man/woman who has just picked up enough guts to come back to church after years of wild living?

²ἐσπλαγγνίσθη "have pity, feel sympathy with/for someone" from σπλαγγνίζομαι which came from the noun σπλάγγνα, ὡν n (only in the plural) = lit. inward parts, entrails; fig. the seat of emotions, in our usage *heart* (Bauer, 1979:762f.) Also cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.755).

³δραμῶν 2ndAor ptc act m s nom of τρέχω run (Bauer, *ibid*:825). Also cf. Hendriksen (*ibid*)

⁴ Aorist Indicative active 3 singular of καταφιλέω *kiss* (Mt 26:49; Mk 14:45; Lk 7:38, 45; 15:20; Ac 20:37+); Bauer (1979:420) "Kiss someone in greeting or in farewell." Liddell & Scott (1972:363) "kiss tenderly, caress." This Greek word has the prefix *kata* (κατά), which always indicates force/gusto in some or other way.

⁵ Cf. Hendriksen (*ibid*)

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 15:24). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Indeed! It's *them* that our Heavenly Father searches out. After all, those who are healthy don't need the doctor,⁷ but those who are sick! So, when they then come (come back) to Him and His church, the Father stretches out His arms and welcomes them!

Well, so far re point 2, "A Father Welcomes!"

Here is point 3...

A Brother Shares the Father's Welcome

My brother & sister, our text tells us (that) the older son was coming home from the field. Very unexpectedly he hears music & dancing coming from the farmhouse! "What could this possibly be?" he thought! "Nobody told me we were going to have a party tonight!" So, he calls a servant and asks, "What's going on in the house?"

Says the servant, "Well, don't you know?" "Have you not yet heard?" "Your brother has finally come home and your father is rejoicing that he has received his son back safe & sound!" "*So happy is your father* that he told us to take that calf which he was keeping for a special occasion, and slaughter it so that we can feast and be merry!"

Well, we read that the older brother got so furious⁸ that he would not even go into the house!

Again, we see the father's love! You see, his father leaves the house, the feast and the rejoicing – yes, he goes at length – to come plead with his older son to come *share the father's welcome!*

But the older brother is stubborn and says, "Look, father, all these many years I have served you!" (Well, the Greek text can also be translated as, "all these many years I have *slaved* for you...").⁹

Wow, if that was the spirit with which this grouch has always worked for his father, then no wonder he's so very unhappy!¹⁰

But, continuing with his grudging, this older brother effectively says, "Dad, you killed *the fattened calf* for this good-for-nothing son of yours, while for me you never even gave a skinny goat so I could feast with my friends!" "Look, Dad, this *son of yours*¹¹ (yes, I won't even want to call him "my brother") – well, have you then forgotten? – he demanded a third¹² of your assets in cash and wasted it; and that even on prostitutes!" "Dad, I don't want to be a part of this celebration!"

⁷ Cf. Lk 5:31-32 *And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."*

⁸ ὀργισθη Aorist Indicative Passive 3rd Person Singular of ὀργίζομαι: to be relatively angry—'to be full of anger, to be furious, to be angry.' πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ 'whoever is angry with his brother' Mt 5:22 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 760). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁹ δουλεύω Present Active Indicative 1st Person Singular of δουλεύω^c: to serve, normally in a humble manner and in response to the demands or commands of others—'to serve.' ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις 'but through love serve one another' Ga 5:13; οὐδείς δύναται δυοῖς κυρίοις δουλεύειν 'no one can serve two masters' Mt 6:24. It is possible that in Mt 6:24 δουλεύω should be understood as δουλεύω^a, namely, 'to be a slave' (see 87.79) (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 460). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁰ Also cf. Hendriksen (ibid:757)

¹¹ Cf. verse 30 ὁ υἱός σου οὗτος

¹² Cf. Dt 21:15-17 (especially v.17), "*If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, ¹⁶ then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn, ¹⁷ but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his*" (Emphasis mine). In other words, the prodigal

Says the father effectively, “But son, did you then not know that, because you have always been with me, all that I have is yours to enjoy anyway!?” “So, look!” “Is it not fitting for us all – including you – to celebrate and be glad, for see: my son who has just returned safely, he is *your brother!*”¹³ “And he was spiritually dead (for all we knew he could have been physically dead, too)!” “But, see?” “He’s alive!” “Yes, he was lost, but now he is found!”¹⁴

My brother & sister, our Lord Jesus did not finish this parable – yes, He did not tell us whether the older brother’s heart softened so that he entered that farmhouse & shared his father’s welcome!

You ask, “But why did Jesus not tell us?”

The answer is: Jesus wanted his first hearers (and you & me) to answer that question for ourselves – the question whether you & I, if we were that older brother, would have gone into that house and shared our father’s welcome!

After all, let’s face it: whom, among his first audience, did Jesus want to link with this grumpy older brother?

Well, was it not the Pharisees & scribes?

Yes, indeed! You see, the whole reason why Christ told these three parables was not so much to focus on the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, but on our Heavenly Father’s welcoming of repentant sinners and on our sharing in His welcoming of such as these!

So, instead of calling this parable, “The Parable of the Lost Son,” look, would it not have been better to split this parable in two and call it, “*The Parable of a Father’s Welcoming of His Repentant Son,*” and “*An Older brother’s Sharing in His Father’s Welcome!*”?

Thus, in telling these three parables, is it not that Christ was effectively saying, “What’s wrong with you Pharisees & Scribes!”? “When you see Me eating with tax collectors & sinners, should you not rejoice with My Father in heaven and with the angels!?” “Yes, should you not rejoice that many tax collectors & sinners are always seeking My company and I theirs?”¹⁵ “Should you not sing for joy that I have even appointed a tax collector (Levi/Matthew) as one of my disciples?”

“So, what’s wrong with you Pharisees & Scribes?” “In whose camp are you!?” “If you can’t share the Father’s welcoming of repentant sinners, then, effectively, you’re not on His side!” “So, is it therefore not right that I once called you ‘Children of the devil!’?”¹⁶

My brother & sister, here’s a question: Are you and I perhaps like the prodigal’s older brother – yes, like the Pharisees & Scribes?

I mean, have not you & I always been in the Father’s house (His Church)? Yes, have we not, just like the older brother, been in the Father’s house and yet not *with* the Father? Have we not been serving Him, but in an obligatory & grudging way? So, have we perhaps been lost sons/daughters right here inside our Father’s house, so that, actually, just like that older

knew that after his father’s death, his older brother would get two-thirds of the inheritance and he, the younger one, one-third.

¹³ Cf. v.32

¹⁴ For vv. 31-32, cf. “***And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found’***” (NIV).

¹⁵ Cf. Lk 15:1 ***Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.*** (Emphasis mine)

¹⁶ Cf. Jn 8:44-47 “***You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?***

⁴⁷ ***Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.***”

brother, we are no better than the younger one – the lost one (yes, the prodigal)? And have we not perhaps, just like the older brother – and just like the Pharisees – always been trying to justify ourselves and trying to earn our salvation by saying, “Look, Father, I must be right with You, for all these years I have been serving You here in this church!”?

Well, if that’s so, will not the Father then say to us, “Older brother (Older sister), did you not know it is not mere outward proximity to Me that unites you with Me, but a humble heart!” “Older brother/sister, where were you when I was seeking the lost in your community?” “Pieter, where were you when your next-door neighbour needed to hear the Gospel?”

“And did you welcome Sally or Amanda or Tom or Dick with open arms when, despite their infamous past & serious sins in this city, they took the first brave steps of coming back to the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata? Yes, did you rejoice with heaven? Did you share My welcoming of repentant sinners?”

My brother & sister, some churchgoers have said, “But can we really trust this man/woman’s repentance?” “Shall we really welcome him/her so early in the piece?” “I mean, what if they fall back again into their old sinful ways?”

I like what one commentator says, “If there is subsequent failure, we can deal with that then. In the meantime, it is important to say, ‘Welcome home!’ ‘You belong!’” After all, is it not by God’s grace only, that you & I, too, have been accepted into the family? So, for what reason will we now offer higher standards than God’s to others who seek to walk with him?¹⁷

Besides, let’s remember 2 Cor 2:7 which says about the repentant sinner, “...*you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*”

My brother & sister, here is something significant! You see, in this parable, our Lord Jesus was comparing certain characters with certain people in real life. Indeed, we have seen that:

- The lost son in the parable represents the *tax collectors & sinners*
- The father in the parable represents *our Heavenly Father*
- The grumpy older brother in the parable represents the *grumpy, snobby, Pharisees & Scribes.*

Thus, these three in the parable are compared with three in real life!

But did you notice that, there when Christ told this parable, there were actually *four* parties in real life (and not just three)?

I mean, there were...

- Tax collectors (pictured by the repentant lost son)
- The Father in heaven (pictured by the father of the lost son)
- The grumpy Pharisees & Scribes (pictured by the grumpy older brother)

These three!

But note: there, in that real-life scene that day, there was also a fourth character, i.e. *the Lord Jesus!*

So, here’s question: Who in that parable would be Jesus’ counterpart?

With whom in the parable could we compare Christ?

¹⁷ My adaptation of the words of Bock, D. L. (1996). *Luke* (pp. 411–416). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

- Well, He is not to be compared with the father in the parable/story – that’s the *Heavenly Father’s* place!
- He is not to be compared with the lost Son – that’s the *tax collectors’* place!
- He is to be compared with the older brother!!!!

You say, “What!!!???” “But I thought the *Pharisees* were the older brother!”

Yes, you’re right! But look! Christ, too, is the older brother! Yes, Christ is what the older brother *should have been!* Yes, is not Christ the Perfect Older Brother who *shares the Father’s welcome* with repentant sinners!

So, in conclusion, allow me this question: If you had a camera that could take only *one* picture, which scene in the story of the prodigal son would you want to capture?

Well, is the Christian author not right when he says, *that one* where the father runs with open arms ready to embrace his returning son! ¹⁸

Well, our heavenly Father did give you & me open arms – He demonstrated this on Golgotha, there where His Son’s open arms were nailed to the cross to give you and me access to the Father’s house!

Do you see the Good (no, the Best) Older Brother?¹⁹

Why not have Him here in your heart?

Why shall you & I not return His enormously big love with ours?

Yes, why not go live His example to many younger brothers/sisters out there!?

AMEN (2558 words excluding footnotes & textboxes)

¹⁸ My adaptation of the words of Lucado (ibid:84-85)

¹⁹ That He referred to His disciples (and you & me) as His brothers, can be seen e.g. from Jn 20:17, ***Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*** (Emphasis mine).