

The Fatherhood of God

Luke 15 v 11-32

Context:

This Sunday we celebrate Father's Day. It tends not to have such a high profile in the life of the church, compared to Mothering Sunday, but it presents us with a valuable opportunity to reflect on the biblical truth of the Fatherhood of God, one of the central themes of Scripture. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to call God 'Abba, Father, and in the famous Parable of the Prodigal Son he gives us a stunning insight into the *kind* of Father God really is. So, let's explore Luke 15 v 11-32 together.

Observation:

1. What demand did the younger son make of his father in v 12 and how did the father respond?
2. What did the younger son then do according to v 13?
3. What crisis then hit him in v 14?
4. What did he do to ease his situation in v 15?
5. How did he feel at this time according to v 16?
6. What turning point came in v 17?
7. What did the younger son decide to do in v 18-20a?
8. What shocking thing happened in v 20b?
9. How did the younger react to his father's unexpected behaviour in v 21?
10. What further shocking behaviour did the father exhibit in v 22-23?
11. What reason did the father give for his behaviour in v 24?
12. Where was the older son while all this was happening and what did he hear in v 25?
13. What did he do in v 26 and what was the reply in v 27?
14. How did the older son react in v 28a?
15. What did the father do in v 28b and what was the older son's complaint in v 29-30?
16. What was the father's final response in v 31-32?

Meaning:

1. What was the context that inspired and provoked Jesus to tell this parable and the previous two parables before it (see v 1-2)?
2. Children would inherit their father's wealth and property at his death. So, what was the implication of the younger son's demand in v 12?
3. How do you think the father must have felt at this request?
4. What do you think motivated the younger son's demand in v 12 and his behaviour in v 13?
5. In what ways do we think and behave like this?
6. It was illegal for a Jew to eat pork because pigs were regarded as unclean animals. So, how does the younger son's situation in v 14-16 demonstrate the depths to which he had sunk?
7. In what ways does *our* rebellious behaviour result in us reaping what we sow?

8. The younger son *came to his senses* in v 17. Why is it only sometimes when we hit rock bottom, like the younger son did, that we realise our folly and begin to turn a corner?
9. The younger son felt that he no longer deserved to be regarded as a son of his father because of his behaviour, but he hoped to at least be regarded as a servant. To what extent do we feel that we forfeit our status as God's children due to our sinful behaviour and need to earn his love and approval by our service?
10. What is so shocking about the father's actions in v 20? Are we shocked that Jesus is telling us that God is like this towards sinners?
11. What do the symbolic actions of the father in v 22-23 indicate about how he regarded the younger son and how God regards sinners?
12. How do the father's words in v 24 summarise what it means to be a Christian?
13. Why do you think the older son was so angry (v 28)? Can you sympathise with him?
14. In what ways might we regard others in the same way the older son regarded his brother?
15. The irony of the parable is that the younger brother felt like he should be treated as a *servant* because of what he had done but was welcomed back by his father as a *son*. Whereas the older brother was always regarded as a *son* by his father (see v 31) but felt like a *servant*! What is the difference between being a son/daughter of God or a servant of God? What impact might knowing we are truly God's child have on our life?
16. To what extent does this parable address the context of v 1-2?

Application:

1. What are some of the common images people have about what God is like and how might this parable change these perceptions?
2. The parable invites us to identify with one or other of the two sons – so which do you think you are most like – the younger son or the older son?

Pray:

- Thank God for his fatherly care and love for us.
- Pray for God's grace to view ourselves and others through God's eyes.