



Read Luke 15: 11-32 The Lost Son or The Running Father

Most of us know this parable so well that there is a danger that we do not read afresh the challenges Jesus lays out. It provides so much to talk through, but for our purposes today we will focus on the father and older son, two characters so brilliantly drawn, and compare their reactions to and welcome of the lost son.

1. The older son

a. Of the audience listening to Jesus as he speaks, who do you think he intends the character of the elder son to depict?

b. What are the characteristics of these people Jesus is railing against?

c. Luke places this parable of the Lost Son in the midst of several teaching parables (chapters 14,15,16). Look at the titles over each section within these chapters. Is this relevant to your answers to question 1b?

d. Examine the angry points of argument the older son makes to his father (v 28-30). Would you say they are reasonable? Does this relate in any way to our relationship to God the Father?

2. The father Unmistakably for me, the father character is the clearest and most beautiful depiction of God in the Bible. [I recommend you read Tom Wright's explanation of this whole parable in his book 'Luke for Everyone'] Picture if you will the broken-hearted father each morning scanning the horizon (for months/years?) in the direction his lost son departed, hoping and hoping – until one day in the distance he sees he can't help himself, he picks up the long hem of his garment and runs to greet him, (in this patriarchal society, for the head of the family to be running for anything was unheard-of). The son, full of regret and repentance, humbly seeks his father's forgiveness, but the father almost brushes aside what his son is saying, he just wants to have his son back and to fully reinstate him (the best robe, ring and sandals) within the family. Not even a hint of judgement or condemnation.

a. What do you think was the lost son's expectation of the sort of welcome he would receive? What was he hoping for? What was he not hoping for? What might be in the mind of every unknown first-time visitor to our church?

b. What do you think was in the lost son's mind as his father ran towards him? Was he remembering with trepidation his past misdemeanours with a sense of unworthiness, or smiling in hope at being home at last? What did the father make absolutely clear to him on arrival?

c. What single word comes to mind to summarize the father's explanation of the reason for celebration to the older son?

d. If only we knew what happens following the end of the parable! What changes would you expect in the character of the father and the older son if you had to write the next chapter?

Prayer O God, the well of love and Father of all, make us so to love that we know not but to love every man/woman in Jesus Christ you our Lord. (14th century Collect)

Thought for the week 'The heart of the gospel is that all are called, all are included, all who ask to enter are allowed into the kingdom of heaven We can be the communities God intends us to be if we put our hearts and minds to the task [of gospel standards of welcome and hospitality], obeying and imitating the God of hospitality who welcomes every sinner to sit, eat and rejoice at the table'. (from 'Everybody Welcome' Church House Publishing)

Bible used = NIV 2011 translation

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