

What is the answer? We know all the problems, but what is the answer? What is sufficient to ease human suffering, while at the same time satisfies our intellectual and emotional longings?

The conditions surrounding the parable

- Jesus has been preaching, healing, etc
- Jesus is surrounded by all kinds of people - Pharisees and sinners
- Pharisees and scribes grumble at Jesus showing grace to the sinners

So Jesus is standing between two types of people, and proceeds to tell a story about a man with two sons, one seen as unrighteous and the other as righteous. However, we will see that both are lost in similar and complementary ways.

The younger son

- Demands the inheritance- insult to the father, can't wait for him to die.
- Moves away to live recklessly (older brother identifies prostitution) spending everything.
- Hits rock bottom and resolves to earn his way back into his fathers good grace.

The younger son threw himself into a life of pleasure without regard for what is right and true. His understanding of how to come back into a relationship with his father is through earning and paying back his wrong doing.

How does the father respond?

- Sees the younger son while still far off- means he has been looking for his return.
- Runs to meet him and embrace him- risks embarrassment as it was undignified for patriarchs to run.
- Interrupts the younger sons petition to earn back love - the love of the father is not something that is earned, it is the fathers to give - celebration follows the fathers reception of his lost son.

The older son

- Working in the fields and coming back to the news of celebration.
- He becomes angry and refuses to enter the celebration in protest- causing his father public embarrassment .
- Father endures the embarrassment and comes out to plead with his son.

- Older son sees his father as miserly, sees himself as slaving for his father- becomes angry in thinking that his father owes him.

The older son wrongly believed that it was his actions as a faithful worker in his fathers house, especially when compared to the younger son, that brought upon him the fathers love. This false assumption about his own actions in the end pushed him out of relationship with his loving father.

So through the parable both sons find themselves lost in different and complementary ways.

- The younger son is lost by throwing off the “rules” of the father and almost becomes bound by “rules” of his own creation.
- The older son is lost because he believes that he has earned his fathers love by his adherence to the rules - as demonstrated by his outright rejection of the younger son despite the reception of the father.

Back to the condition for this parable - all people coming to Jesus.

- The tax collectors and sinners are lost because they have thrown themselves into service of the self.
- The Pharisees and scribes are lost because they wrongly believe that they have earned God’s love and approval - thus perverting God’s law bringing his anger.

What hope is there for the two types of people?

This parable is the third in a string of parables:

- Lost sheep - man loses one of his hundred sheep, searches for it, finds it, rejoices.
- Lost Coin - woman has ten silver coins and loses one so she searches for it, finds it, and rejoices.
- Man with two sons - interruption - no one goes to search for the younger son! Who was responsible for searching for the younger son? That responsibility in this culture falls to the firstborn son.
 - Jesus is making a stinging indictment of the Pharisees, both in his day and today.
 - Older brothers outside the church.

So what is the answer? The answer is that Jesus is our true older brother who at the behest of the Father, humbled himself and came into this earth to call back to himself the righteousness and the unrighteous.

Jesus picks up the tab for the younger sons, paying in full their debt to the father by giving up his life on the cross - satisfying the wrath and justice of God.

Jesus calls the righteous to see that it is only by God's grace that they are right with God, calling them to repent of their self-righteousness.

What is the gospel? I'm going to both paraphrase and expand on this verse for clarity sake - For in this manner God demonstrated his love for all creation, that he gave his only begotten son (Jesus) to give up his life to satisfy the justice of God, that whosoever believes in Jesus, shall not spend an eternity in agony apart from God, but instead shall live in the joy of God's very presence for ever.

Some think that the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure will bring satisfaction. But often it brings isolation, depression, emptiness, and despair. So, the pendulum swings in the opposite direction entirely to finding satisfaction in how good of a person we are. We measure the good deeds we do and we have an over inflated sense of who we are, and we look down our nose at others - judging them for not cleaning themselves up.

The gospel is something wholly different to the pattern of the world. It calls the indulgent and the righteous to repent. Not to a pattern of trying harder- but to a relationship. How?

Christianity is not a philosophy or moral code - it is news. News that Jesus came into the world, loved, died, and came back to life. This Jesus, both fully God and man is the answer.

1. Like the father of the two sons, so we must receive the fathers acceptance.
2. Life change (repentance and good deeds) are the result of love and acceptance.
3. We are gracious to others because we remember that we are saved by grace

Resources for a deeper understanding:

To Be A Christian: An Anglican Catechism (Questions 1-17)

Timothy Keller, *Prodigal God* (ISBN: 978-1-59448-402-5)