

Our Place at His Place

Un-Willing

October 25, 2020

Welcome to where we're learning how to join Dad's party!



Ever secretly envy the sinful indulgence of others? It's a common temptation for believers, in a culture where media bombards us with the distorted reality of consequence-free sin. But, **it's very dangerous to underestimate the cost of someone else's sin.** But that's what we do.



Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear [Jesus]. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." – Luke 15:1-2 NIV



So, they stayed *outside*. Refused to join in with those *inside*. So Jesus told about a Lost Sheep and then about a Lost Coin, and then:



Jesus continued **[the theme]**: "There was a man who had *two* sons." – Luke 15:11 NIV



One son is rebellious and rude. He receives his inheritance early, *before* his father dies, and then publically insults him; and he wastes his father's will on the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. And the other son is the prodigal. We talked about *him* last Sunday. He wasted/prodigaled dad's money on lusts of the flesh. He's the backsliding son. Today we're talking about the back-*biting* son, who, like Jesus' self-righteous listeners, refuses to join the party. **How much joy have you forfeited by failing to forgive?**



I understand how ol' Jealous feels. Junior demanded, and then sold off, a third of the family estate. Fields. Barns. Animals. Embarrassed the family in the process. Then left town and left *him* with all the responsibility. **He's got every right to be upset, but not to be unforgiving.**

But, while he was working his tail off in the field, Junior comes home and gets the red carpet. And dad throws and party. And no one comes and tells him. And they expect him to join in?

The father **[had]** said to his servants ... "Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For *this* son of mine was *dead* **[in his sin]** and is alive again; he was *lost* and is found." So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." The older brother became angry and refused to go in. – Luke 15:22-28 NIV

Yet another rebellious, public insult toward this gracious, generous, father.



Just like those hard-hearted Pharisees listening in while refusing to enter in, to Jesus' banquet *and* His joy in welcoming their soft-hearted, self-aware, sinner-brothers back home. You see, the **Pharisees, elders, priests, and scribes were all from the tribe of Levi**; because, only the Levites were appointed by God to manage His temple and teach His people. (Num 18) And so from early on, **Levite boys were taught and trained in** everything from reading and writing, Levitical laws, regulations, math, money changing, languages, and **collecting and managing the temple tax**. And the Romans greatly rewarded these skills. But woe to those sons of Levi who sold out! Like Matthew, a.k.a. Levi.

They were despised by their Levitical brothers for squandering their inheritance from God, and for soiling the honorable name of their tribal brothers, who withstood the temptation of big money and easy women, and stayed to serve in the massive temple complex and synagogues.

Funny thing though, Jesus needed a trained Levite on His team, to write the Gospel to the Jews – which is exactly what Matthew, a.k.a. Levi, did. But, Jesus needed His Levite to be trained yet untainted by the Pharisees' influence. And that's why He chose a *despised* tax collector! It's difficult to see that **the Lord can put our bad past to His good use**. And, know what's even harder to see? **How Jesus is working in those who've really hurt us**. So, if you want to remain in our Father's good graces, **try to error on the side of Dad's grace and mercy**. Or you'll likely miss out on quite a few parties with Jesus!



Poor dad. One son is a greedy pig who ends up eating with pigs. And the other is so pig-headed he won't eat with his father. This parable should've been called the two little pigs! One little son went to market. One stubborn son stayed home. One little son had roast beef, the other little son had none – and *he's* so upset when his brother repents, that he goes waa-waa-waa all the way home.



But, know who was even *more* upset about Junior's return? That fattened calf! Boy, *he's* none too happy. Although dad *should* be angry with ol' *Jealous*; but, true to form, Jesus offers a provoking surprise in His father's reaction.

So his father went out and *pleaded* with him. – Luke 15:28 NIV

That's a strong term. And another surprisingly gracious response in the face of a shockingly rebellious offense. The father runs to his repented little son; and pleads with his stubborn little son. And thus, Jesus portrays how **our Father takes the initiative to reconcile His underserving children**. But when ol' *Jealous* opens his mouth, he reveals his heart toward his loving father.

But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been *slaving* for you and *never* disobeyed your *orders*. – Luke 15:29 NIV

Well the truth comes out. **He's been secretly resenting the father for a long time**. Probably sees dad's **grace** and **mercy** toward his sinful brother as **indulgence** or **weakness**. I'll bet I know what ol' *Jealous* would've done if Junior had asked *him* for his third of the family estate!

There's so much wrong here, where to begin? This isn't a son who's gratefully submitting to what he perceives as a gracious father. No, he sees himself as "slaving" for a his *task-master*, and dad's directions as "orders". And Jesus is giving voice to the heart of the religious rulers who regarded themselves as sons of God. But, **self-righteous believers substitute rules for relationship, and legalism for love.**



'Ol Jealous totally takes dad's generosity and mercy for granted. Otherwise he'd appreciate his father's grace. And appreciation would produce a joyful desire to partner and serve. Because, **heartfelt obedience only comes with gratitude.** And **gratitude only comes with understanding;** and **understanding only comes with closeness.** So we must draw *close* to our Father, and *talk* to our Father, to *learn* all we can about the *heart* of our Father. Otherwise, there's no desire to partner and serve. And **without desire, it's a chore to stay on the farm.**

And did ol' Jealous just say he's "never disobeyed"? We know *that's* a lie. Know why? Because, *right now!* Dad's pleading with you to forgive and celebrate with him. But he's bent on insulting his father, devaluing dad's grace and mercy, and libeling him by labeling him a slave-driver; not to mention diminishing dad's *joy*, and actually taking *offense* at his father's forgiving nature. Yeah, this is the guy who claims: "All these years I've ... never disobeyed your orders". Oh, my. **Bitterness exaggerates our godliness and our hardships.** And that's because, a self-centered sense of fairness will always focus on **the bad that has taken place** over **the good that is taking place.**



Jesus once said that hypocritical Pharisees are like whitewashed tombs (Mt 23:27): **orderly on the outside while decaying on the inside.** Self-righteous believers excel at whitewashing their exterior. But, ever smell something dead and decaying? Apparently **that's what our hypocrisy smells like to the Lord.** And this kid's stinking hypocritical tantrum ain't over ...

Yet you never gave *me* even a young *goat* so *I* could celebrate with *my friends*. – Luke 15:29 NIV

Someone doesn't think life is *fair*. And thank the Lord it *isn't!* Because, just like us, **this kid's oblivious ungratefulness blinds him to the obvious.** His father's grace and generosity isn't fair at all; it's downright ridiculous! Remember *this* little detail:

[A man] had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. – Luke 15:11-12 NIV

And as the eldest, ol' Jealous got two-thirds of dad's estate! And Junior liquidated his third, which means that, as he speaks – or rather, yells – one hundred percent of everything on the farm, including every goat and calf, is *already* his! Trouble is, **he's been working with no sense of ownership.** If you can't see, trust, feel, or believe what you've already been given by God, **you're likely still trying to earn it.** Junior may have squandered dad's property, but **ol' Jealous squandered dad's generosity, grace, mercy, and love.** *Both* wasted their inheritance. Only one repented. So, in the end, which son actually turns out to be the *prodigal*?

Through his bitter lens, ol' Jealous can only see *his* inheritance as **a burden to bear**, rather than **a gift to receive, possess, appreciate, invest, and enjoy**. All this wasted time trying to earn what's been his since before Junior even left. And to make it even worse, he's ignoring the inheritance he's already received while accusing his father of being unfair *and stingy!*

But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" – Luke 15:30 NIV

Who said anything about "prostitutes"? I love that Jesus throws in the older brother's conjecture. He doesn't know what happened in the DC; but he can sure imagine!



And he seems to think Junior is "getting away" with something. "Oh, sure! He's *had* his fun. And now the slate's wiped clean? I mean, he liquidates a *third* of our estate, leaves us high and dry, goes and blows our legacy, pawns our ring, robs our dignity, humiliates me, and just comes back like nothing's happened and gets a *party?!'*" You see, ol' Jealous wants him to suffer.

We covered this a couple weeks ago when we talked about how the *grudge* holds us. **Ol' Jealous wants justice on his own terms**, not the father's. And, besides belittling his father's grace, mercy, and love, ol' Jealous is *dangerously* underestimating the cost and of Junior's sin.



Truth is, getting away with sin is like getting away with radiation poisoning. You don't. **You suffer it whether you know it or not.** It builds up till it's too late. And this is basically what every repentant prodigal comes to know: **sin tends to build slowly, steadily, and silently until it destroys.** It's happy to give you a head start; but **it always catches up.** And so, how does his father respond? He lets the little jerk have it! "It" being, his love. And a gentle reminder of what he's been given.



"My son," the father said, **[not my slave]** "you are always with me, **[why would we celebrate your return?]** and *everything* I have *is* yours." – Luke 15:31 NIV

Our partnership isn't based on your efforts, but on my grace and generosity and love. How can you *not* see that? You need to stop undervaluing *our* relationship and *your* inheritance." Did you notice how ol' Jealous said: "This son of yours". Why's he say it that way? Because when he asked what was going on, he would've been told what his father had said.

Let's have a feast and celebrate. **[Why?]** For this son of mine was *dead* and is *alive* again; he was *lost* and is *found*." – Luke 15:23-24 NIV

Well, after reminding ol' Jealous that everything dad had is already his, dad says:

But *we* had to celebrate **[you and me]** and be glad because this brother of yours was *dead* **[in sin]** and is *alive* again; he was *lost* and is *found*. - Luke 15:32 NIV

And this leads us to Jesus' conclusion, the lesson for the Pharisees outside listening in, and the second obvious thing ol' Jealous was too self-centered to see. **Dad didn't kill the calf for Junior.** He killed it *because of* Junior. But, **he killed it for ol' Jealous**; so that he and his father could celebrate together the repentant heart of their rebellious son and brother.

Let's face it: **failing to forgive only keeps us out of our own party.**