

THY KINGDOM COME

Pt 5: Kingdom Relationship

Jesus came to this world telling stories. Stories are interesting, compelling and engaging. They make the difficult understandable. Even those who know very little about the Bible know something about the story Jesus tells in Luke 15: The Parable of the Prodigal Son. Shakespeare borrowed its plot to pen “The Merchant of Venice” and “Henry IV.” The image was depicted by famous painters like Rembrandt and Rubens. And even Hank Williams contemporized the story in a country song. It’s not uncommon at all to hear a troubled parent today refer to their child as a prodigal. Of all of Jesus’ parables, this one is the most richly detailed, powerfully dramatic and intensely personal. He weaves through this tale a full range of emotion – from sadness, to triumph, from a sense of shock to desire for closure. The characters are familiar and relatable. At times you find yourself grieving for the younger son and yet sympathizing with the older one and utterly amazed at the father in the way he treated both. Why did Jesus tell this story in the first place? And to whom did he intend to address the underlying message of this story?

¹Now^(A) the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes^(B) grumbled, saying,^(C) "This man receives sinners and^(D) eats with them." ³So he told them this parable. . .

In the context of a mixed group of people who couldn’t have been on more opposite ends of the religious spectrum, Jesus tells a story. In fact he tells three stories; all of them communicating a general theme of Heaven’s joy when a sinner repents. If you’ll scan through this chapter, in verse 3 he tells them the story of a lost sheep and how the shepherd rejoices when he finds it. In verse 8, a woman in possession of nine coins searches diligently for the tenth and rejoices when she finds it. Both stories illustrating the joy of Heaven when a sinner repents. The tax collectors are intrigued, and the Pharisees are suspicious. And so Jesus tells another story. The younger son represents the typical sinner. The father’s patience illustrates divine grace. The prodigal’s return demonstrates genuine repentance. What is often missed in this story, which in fact, is the central and culminating lesson of the parable is the elder brother’s indifference to the younger brother and his self-righteous resentment of the father’s forgiveness. This is a story about two sons, neither of which had a loving relationship with an extravagantly generous Father. Notice something in the story.

¹²And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me^(N) the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided^(O) his property between them.

A child normally receives their inheritance after the death of the father. In essence this kid is saying to the Dad, I wish you were dead. And the older son isn’t much better.

²⁸But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, Other translations use the word slaved. For years I have slaved for you. . . and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might^(AG) celebrate with my friends.

Is that what life has been like for you? Slavery. Obligation. The older was as resentful as the younger was rebellious. Verse 31, here's a dad saying: son, everything I have is yours. The central figure in this story is a Father who was unreasonably extravagant in His love for both children. Jesus is describing what true life in the kingdom of God is all about. And the reason why this story is so compelling is because it intrigues those who can't believe the kindness of God and it confronts those who can't believe the kindness of God. The tax collectors are standing there amazed at God's own delight in the redemption of sinners. The Pharisees are standing there inflexibly hostile toward the idea that such sinners could, or better, should be redeemed. Earlier, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus made, what I believe to be a commonly misunderstood statement.

Matthew 5:20 (NIV)

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. If you grew up in church hearing lots of sermons you probably picked up on the fact that scribes and Pharisees got picked on a lot and for good reason. You never see Jesus getting angry unless the scribes and Pharisees show up. We need to cut them some slack, because in that period of time, no one was more intent on getting it right than the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes were men devoted to the Word of God, experts on what the Bible said. And the Pharisees were the religious zealots taking the interpretation of the scribes and made practical application so that they could get it right. The problem was, they were so intent on getting it right that they got it all wrong. They focused so intently at the letter of the law that they missed the spirit of the law. They looked the part, talked the part, gave all the right answers but Jesus said their hearts were far from God. Is it possible to look righteous and not be righteous? That's what we call hypocrisy. When Jesus said your righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, was he raising the bar or lowering it? The tax collectors and sinners heard those words and knew they couldn't keep up with the imposed standards of the Pharisees. The Pharisees heard those words and for once they're thinking, "maybe Jesus isn't that far off base." All through the sermon on the mount Jesus was explaining that true righteousness is a matter of the heart, not the hands. Kingdom righteousness is about who you are not about what you do. It's about people who are poor in spirit – who realize their need for God. It's about people who mourn over their sinfulness and recognize their inability to get it right. It's about people who are meek and humble themselves under the rule and reign of God in their lives.

The Kingdom of God is about a Father who wants both, his rebellious son and his self-righteous son to enjoy like in the kingdom. The younger son came to his dad with a plan. The older son came to his dad with a complaint. And both of them had to do with slavery.

¹⁷"But^(R) when he^(S) came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father,^(T) I have sinned against^(U) heaven and before you. ¹⁹^(V) I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."^(W)

Here's the young one thinking: if I could get back in as a slave I'd be ok. And down in verse 29 the older says, I've been slaving For years. The younger son had his speech prepared – take me back as a servant. Why? Because, that's what he thought he deserved and that's what he thought he could earn. And the Father says, you're not a slave you're a son. That's your identity in the kingdom.

Galatians 3:26-4:7

²⁶for in Christ Jesus^(A) you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized^(C) into Christ have^(D) put on Christ. ²⁸^(E) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave^(a) nor free, ^(F) there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And^(G) if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, ^(H) heirs according to promise.

When you were born again you were received, not as a servant who has earned their way in. You're not a pauper living in the servant's quarters. You're a son living in the house with the Father. This is important because the way you view yourself in relationship to God is the way you're going to relate to God. Whether you're a tax collector or a Pharisee, your status in the family has nothing to do with you. Through faith, trusting in God and what God says, you are an heir according to the promise.

¹I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave,^(J) though he is the owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³In the same way we also, when we were children,^(L) were enslaved to the elementary principles^(K) of the world.

"Principles of the world" many scholars understand this to be the Law. And that maybe correct - It's the law that shows us what sin is, shows us that we're sinners. But elsewhere Paul uses the phrase, "principles of the world." Not the law, but the world to refer to the world system, the philosophy of the world. We know that Satan is the prince of this world who operates the system of this world. And that's what we've been learning in this series, you and me, we've been held captive by the dominion of darkness and through the cross have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son.

Which is exactly what Paul says next:

⁴But^(J) when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,^(K) born^(L) of woman, born^(M) under the law, ⁵^(N) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive^(O) adoption as sons.

Whether you were a Jew living under the bondage of law, or whether you were a gentile living under the bondage of the world system – Jesus has invaded the kingdom of darkness and we have received adoption as sons.

⁶And because you are sons, God has sent^(P) the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then^(Q) an heir through God.

The Greek word 'abba' is the English word, 'daddy.' Daddy is an intimate, personal designation. It reflects the kind of relationship you have with your father. Jesus changed the relationship. And friends, relationship changes everything. Here are three things that relationship does for you.

Relationship Settles Identity

You have a name that identifies you. You didn't get that name on your own, you didn't name yourself. I remember my sister when she was about 7 or 8 wanted us to call her Cher. If you're my age you'll remember where she got that idea. My parents weren't going to call her Cher because that's not the name she was given.

1 John 3:1 (NIV)

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

I want you to see something from the encounter Jesus had with Satan. In chapter three Jesus is baptized, God speaks from heaven, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove confirming who Jesus is. Very next verse, Chapter 4:

^{1(A)} Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness^(B) to be tempted by the devil.

And notice how Satan does this:

²And after fasting^(C) forty days and forty nights, he^(D) was hungry. ³And^(E) the tempter came and said to him, "If you are^(E) the Son of God,

^{5(J)} Then the devil took him to^(K) the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

Satan is so predictable. Satan has been at his game for thousands of years, he hasn't come up with anything new, same 'ole stuff. Back in the garden of Eden he planted doubt in the mind of Adam and Eve. Did God really say that? Are you sure that's what God meant? Jesus comes up out of the waters of baptism and hears the voice of God say: this is my son. And what does Satan say, "IF you are the Son of God." Maybe you're not. Are you sure? Would God let his own son go hungry? IF you are the Son of God. . . He does it twice to Jesus. And He does it to you all the time. Paul said in Galatians that the Spirit of God through the Word of God testifies that you have a father in heaven who calls you His child. The Kingdom of God is not about what you do, it's first and foremost about who you are; a redeemed, forgiven child of God.

Relationship Secures Inheritance

My second year in college I was working in the cafeteria paying off my tuition. My parents show up for a visit while I was at work: ripped jeans long before that was in style, holes in my sneakers, worn out t-shirt. And I remember my dad saying, no son of mine is going to look like that, so they took me shopping. And as any parent knows, a child spends your money a lot easier than they spend their own.

Luke 12:32 (ESV)

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

The Father says to the younger, "No son of mine is going to live like a slave." The Father says to the older, "Everything I have is yours." You misunderstand your relationship with your Father, you're not going to ask for much. You're not going expect much. You might think He's able but you might not believe He's willing to do far more than you could ask or imagine. Relationship secures inheritance. And finally, relationship shapes behavior.

Relationship Shapes Behavior

Galatians 3 tells us we've been adopted as sons and daughters. We've been given a new identity, a new name. And when we take on the new name that's when we begin to reflect the nature of that name, we take on the family resemblance.

John 14:21 (NLT)

Those who obey my commandments are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them, and I will love them. And I will reveal myself to each one of them."

You obey because you love. Obedience doesn't generate love, love generates obedience. This is where the Pharisees got it wrong. They thought behavior shaped relationship. Friends, it's the other way around. Relationship shapes behavior. Christianity is a relationship not a religion. Religion is about what you do. Relationship is about who you are. It's the relationship that changes you.

A forty year old woman gets very sick, goes to the hospital and gets a diagnosis. The doctor determines she doesn't have long to live. Alarmed at the news she prays for God to heal her and He does. In fact, God tells her, you've got 40 more years to live. 40 years, that's pretty specific, she thought. And it's a good long time. And at her age, she decides, since she's already in the hospital, she's going to get a little work done. She gets a tummy tuck and face lift. Fixes her nose and has her eyebrows tattooed. She get all this cosmetic surgery done, walks out of the hospital and gets hit by a truck. She stands there before God and says, "Hey, I thought I had forty more years to live and I get hit by truck coming out of the hospital?" And God, says, "That was you? I didn't recognize you." Question: Does anybody recognize you as a child of God, a son of the king? When Jesus came He explained to us, he taught us that we can't keep the rules. Our righteousness is like filthy rags. And so He died on the cross to exchange

his righteousness for ours. He showed by his own death that the only way to keep the rules is to have a relationship with Him.

Bottom Line: DO I HAVE A GOD I CAN CALL FATHER?

You have a father who wants to call you son or daughter. He died on the cross to have a relationship with you. Where's the status of that relationship for you?