

Connecting with the Heart of the Father

Luke 15

Basis

Talking about the heart of God should be one of the easiest things for a Christian. We know that God expressed His heart through the ultimate sacrifice of His Son. While we “know” this, do we really understand and apply it to our lives, or do we take the truth of this at face value?

*Yes, God loves me **because** He sent Jesus to die for me*

This statement fits our Christian paradigm, but how does it work itself out in our daily lives?

...though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him... - job 13:15a

This is a popular scripture to quote, as it expresses a complete trust and faith in a God whose heart is for us. What we do not quote is the rest of the verse: *I will surely defend my ways to His face*. Like us, Job was battling with circumstances that didn't fit what he knew of God's character and heart. We know that God is holy, that He is love, that He is perfect, but what we don't always know or experience is if He is *for* us.

*A man with leprosy came and knelt before Him and said, “Lord, if you are **willing**, you **can** make me clean” – Matthew 8:2*

When we break it down, though, it can seem that God's love **for us** has little or nothing to do **with us**. He loves us because He can do no different, but given a choice, would God really be inclined toward us? Would He yearn to be in relationship with us if He didn't have to be?

Is God a god that has a heart toward us because of a free will love for us, or because He is simply proving Himself to be God by not going against His nature?

Struggles with a Father's Love

The story of the prodigal sons is a fitting illustration of individuals who were in their father's presence, had access to the father's possessions, but were disconnected from the heart of their father. While we don't know the motivation behind the son's request for inheritance, we know that it was indicative that neither son really understood their father

*...but the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money... then the man who had received the one talent came. “Master”, he said, **I knew** that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed...” – Matthew 25:18, 24*

All of the servants presumably had the same relationship with the master, but it was clear that the one servant viewed his master differently. He saw not what his master was trying to do for him, but what his actions produced. This caused him to judge his master without understanding his heart, or his place in his master's kingdom.

There are many stories in scripture where God's actions don't line up with what we think He should be doing, causing us to judge Him and separate ourselves from Him just enough that we "hide the thing he wants to use in us".

How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you "Violence!" but you do not save?...

I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own... - Habakkuk 1:2, 6

Habakkuk took issue with what he saw was an injustice for those that were called the people of God. To Habakkuk, this was totally out of character with what a righteous God should be displaying. The difference between Habakkuk and the father's sons is that Habakkuk approached God to understand and seek what was right. Similarly, when we see injustices, inequities, or things we just don't understand we have a choice:

- React based on what we see or understand
- Approach God to gain understanding

... if any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him – James 1:5

James' statement was not to be taken out of context. The wisdom being sought was in direct relationship to the trials or tests experienced. What is interesting about this is that it does not say to seek understanding, but wisdom (knowledge of what is right **coupled with** just judgment as to action). So, when we are at a place of struggle, we approach, we seek not only knowledge, but what the appropriate action is in our situation.

A Tale of Two Sons

The parable of the prodigal is in reality a tale of two sons being reconciled to their father. Something in their relationship caused the worse kind of breakdown that could have happened. One son demanded, the other consented, but both were involved in the ultimate betrayal:

Father, you are as good as dead to me, so give me what will be mine when you die

When we typically tell the story, there is the good son, the one who stayed behind, and the bad son - the one who wasted his life with riotous living. Truthfully, both were bad, as neither understood their father's heart. One rejected the kingdom/community, while the other rejected real relationship.

The “Have To” of Christian life

At some level, we are all brought to this point. We are free in Christ... as long as we obey the rules. We “know” it is better inside than out, but our “inside” is in reality no closer to the father than those that are far off. We just look more acceptable to those around us. This is the story of the older son. No better relationship than the younger, but while he watched his younger brother take a step that he wasn't brazen enough to do, the older brother found his relationship “way out in the fields” with the rest of the servants

*Meanwhile the older son was in the field... but he answered his father “Look! All these years I've been **slaving for you** and never disobeyed your **orders**. Yet you **never gave me...** - Luke 15:25, 29*

The older son, although he had the positional relationship and the legal birthright, acted as though he was no better than one of the servants. He thought that the only way to get anything from the father was to serve obediently, to follow orders, and even then there was nothing unique or special about his father's heart toward him. This son appeared to be ok with how things were until an inequity that was “more than he could bear” revealed the true depth of his relationship (or lack thereof) with his father.

Note: Will God allow situations and inequities that are more than we can bear to reveal the true state of our hearts? Ask Habakkuk...

I thought God will not place on us more than we can bear...

This is how we want that scripture to go. It actually says

He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear, but when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (I Corinthians 10:13).

Measuring our worth

The younger son took the bold step to find worth outside of his father's house and relationship. He was ok as long as the blessing held out, but when it was gone, he realized that he was nothing without *what the father had (not who the father was)*.

What are the things the Father has for us that are the defining items of our relationship in Him? Our ministry? Our “blessings”? Our spiritual gifts? What happens if those things are suddenly taken away, or we don't see them functioning in the way we expect? How do we view our relationship with the Father, and more important, his heart toward us?

The younger son had one problem though. He had denounced his right to be in relationship with the father, and judged what his father's reaction to him would be **based on his own deeds**.

*I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am **no longer worthy** to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men – Luke 15:18-19*

The younger son saw a means to an end. The confession was a way to soften up the real request: give me something that I can use to occupy my time, fulfill my needs and make me feel better about myself as a man. *He was not seeking real relationship with the father.* He was still looking for self substantiation. *At least being a servant in my father's house is better than this.* He still didn't understand his father, but felt that at least being in the community was good enough, and as far as he could get within his father's kingdom.

The Father's Heart Revealed

The father in the story reveals the true heart of God. A heart that is hard for the self substantiated or the enslaved son to accept, but a heart that invited them, and invites us into real relationship.

- The father saw him while he was still a long way off (vs 20) – we think that God sees us when we are “right” and “good” and “perfect”, but God sees us when we are way out there, nowhere near Him
 - *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there – Psalm 139:7-8*
- The father pursued him while he was still a long way off. He was filled with compassion. His entire “inner being” wanted his son
 - σπλάγχνον bowels; guts; insides; heart
- the father didn't care about what the son thought of him or of himself. Only that he could have relationship with his son again
 - He didn't ask the son to confess his sins, make restitution, if he had learned his lesson, etc. He didn't even respond to the son's confession
- The father didn't care about his stuff
 - *But the father said to the servants “quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet... - Luke 15:22*
 - The best robe on a man that had just come out of a pig's trough would ruin the robe, but the father didn't care. **It was more important to display the relationship via the robe, than to make him “clean enough” to wear the robe**
 - *My son, the father said, you are always with me and everything I have is yours – Luke 15:31*
- The father couldn't do anything but celebrate the son, not just coming home, but returning to relationship. **Nothing was more important to the father**

If we understand that God wants nothing more and nothing less than full and unhindered relationship with us, then we can understand His love for us. That it is real, not just a character thing, and something that we can receive and experience regardless of whether we are close or far off.