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THE FATHER OF THE PRODIGAL

Greetings dearly beloved!

We pray that you are filled with all of the fullness of God and abounding in love one towards another!

Before we get into this month's teaching, I wanted to update you on some projects that Living Logos Ministries is currently working on...

I am pleased to announce that we just recently completed the translation of our pocket sized book entitled "This One Thing" into the South Indian language of Tamil! Our friend and co-laborer, Vijay Raj from Sozo International Ministries, handled this project for us and we were able, by God's grace, to print 2,000 copies! Praise God!

This was the first book that LLM has had translated and printed into another language, and what I believe to be, the first of many! These books will be handed out similarly to tracts- providing God's precious saints with the knowledge that will equip them to draw more near to their God and stir up the desire of all those who do not know Him to want to. So thank you to everyone who has partnered with LLM and made possible this project!

We are also in the process of purchasing an ISBN for our full length book- "The Believers Battle-Plan"- so that we can put the English version of this book into over a thousand Christian bookstores throughout India! Glory to God! This is going to be such a great source of getting the good news of our victory in Christ spread throughout India. Please be in prayer for this project as it will undoubtedly impact thousands upon thousands of God's precious saints in India who likely have not heard truths like this.

Well, speaking of revolutionary truth, I want to share with you this month something that I have had the opportunity to share recently in the local magazine that I regularly contribute to here in Macon. I have entitled this teaching- "The Father of the Prodigal."

THE TALE OF THREE

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you likely have heard the story of the prodigal son found in Luke chapter 15.

Now most refer to this story as "the Parable of the Prodigal Son", but I am here to tell you that this title is not entirely correct. While this parable certainly teaches us about the lost son- how we all were once lost in sin and how we can receive mercy through repentance- this parable also involves two other characters as well.

Notice that when Jesus begins this parable in verse 11, He says that a certain man had two sons. So this one statement should clearly reveal to us that this parable is not just about the younger, prodigal son. There is also another son being described in this parable- the elder son- whom we find to represent the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

Now there are some Christians who do acknowledge that the purpose of this parable is to describe to us the difference between the two sons, but most miss the fact that there is a third person described in this parable- the father of both of these sons. Again, notice what verse 11 says: It says that a certain man had two sons. Therefore, we have three characters being described to us by Jesus in this parable. And, friends, there is great significance in understanding the attitudes and actions of each one of them.

So what I want to do in this month's Living Logos is to focus on the often overlooked character in this parable- the father of both the prodigal son and the self-righteous son. So let's get into the meat of His Word, shall we?

Now obviously the father in this parable is an illustration of Almighty God. Jesus was using the father and his house in this parable to describe to us our Heavenly Father and His presence.

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

Now the fact that God is called our Father numerous times in Scriptures is a simple and elementary truth that although many of us know in our heads, we do not really know it in our hearts like we should. So let that sink in for a moment: If you are a born again believer, Almighty God is your Father! Praise God!

Now, the very simple truth that God is called our Father in various Scriptures and also is likened to the father in this parable teaches us something extremely powerful: It reveals to us that God is love and He is the best, most loving and caring daddy in the whole world! This one truth should immediately dispel many of the wrong doctrines that we have heard in the church about God's nature.

You see, if God is our Father then we have to embrace the truth that He wants the best for us and would never seek to harm us. Jesus taught us that if we being evil (in comparison to God, who is good) know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more, will our Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him? (see Matthew 7:11) Now that makes sense, doesn't it? But how many in the church today fail to embrace this truth? And that is the deceit of religion: It perverts even the most logical and rational thinking.

But the truth remains that God alone is good and He loves His children more than any earthly father has ever loved his children. And, again, what example did Jesus use to compare God's love for us to a father's love? He said, "How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him?" In other words, **a good father is a good giver of good gifts**. Amen. Therefore, our Heavenly Father must be the best giver the world has ever seen! Thank you Father!

Now this is actually a major point to be learned through this parable: Notice in verse 12 that when the younger son came to ask for his portion of his father's inheritance, the father did not say no!

Now consider this for a moment: Number one, don't you think it was a little inappropriate and presumptuous for this son to come to his father prematurely and ask for his part of the inheritance? How would you feel if your children came to you and asked you for their portion of your will in advance before you kicked the bucket? This is amazing to me that this younger son had the audacity to do this!

But what is even more amazing to me is that there is no evidence that the father ever ridiculed him for asking! No, there is no indication that the father ever questioned him concerning his request. But do you know what is even more amazing than the fact that the son asked? It is how the father responded to his request! Yes, the father actually gave him his inheritance! Wow!

This, to me, shows a wonderful characteristic in the nature of our Heavenly Father: You see, many times we think God thinks and acts like we would, but this is simply untrue. And I believe this is where some of these wrong belief systems about God's nature have been derived from. We think He is easy to fly off the handle because we are tempted to get angry and frustrated so easily. In short, we think He will treat us the way we treat one another, but that is a perversion of the truth. He is far more loving, compassionate, and merciful than we ever dreamed of being- even with our own children.

And in this example of the father's reaction to the younger son's request, we can clearly see that He will never reproach us or rebuke us for asking Him for anything that might be unwise or presumptuous if it falls under our inheritance. He wants to give us the kingdom, beloved!

WHY GOD'S CHILDREN DO NOT RECEIVE

But I want you to notice another truth in verse 12 that is also very important to understand: Not only did the father give the younger son his portion of the inheritance when he asked for it, but this verse actually says that the father "divided to them his livelihood." In other words, he did not just give it to the younger son who asked him for it; he gave it to both of the sons in advance! Now that is a powerful truth, isn't it?

So we can see that this elder son also had his inheritance made available to him. But we also see at the end of this parable that he apparently never understood this or just never decided to take advantage of his portion of the inheritance. This son was still working for his father in the field and, by his own testimony, he was busy for years serving his father, and his father never gave Him these same good gifts.

But let me ask you a question: Did the father not tell him in verse 31 that he was always with him and all that he had was his? He sure did. So what can we learn from this? It is that there are evidently many of God's children who might have been serving the Lord in various ways for many years, but they are not partaking of everything that the Father wills for them to have.

This should illustrate to the church a very important truth: If we do not receive something from God that we needed or even desired, it is not necessarily because our Father did not will for us to have it. I submit to you **that sometimes we do not receive everything God has for us simply because we did not take advantage of all that was already ours** just like this elder son did in this parable! Perhaps we have been praying amiss by begging Him for things He has already given His children. Perhaps we are assuming that if it is His will, He would initiate us partaking of His blessings. But do you see this in this parable? You most certainly do not!

No, this parable reveals to us two of the reasons God's children do not receive their rightful inheritance:

1. **Some do not receive because they do not do what the younger son did- simply ask!** There are many believers who have not because they ask not (see James 4:2). This is because many are timid and uncertain of the nature of their Heavenly Father. So we must ask, and then we shall receive. We must seek, and then we will find. We must knock, and then the door will be opened for us. But He also wants us to ask in faith and ask big. This is what pleases God- not when His church tries to be humble and not trouble their Father with their own needs. It pleases our Father, the King, when we come to Him in childlike faith and expect Him to give us good gifts.

2. **The other reason God's children do not receive everything God has for them is because they are like the older son- they do not receive what has already been given to them.** They continue to work for the Lord thinking that their works will qualify them to have God just sovereignly rain blessings on them. How many of you know that it just does not happen this way? For many of the things we need, we must simply receive the provision that has already been given. And, again, we do this through faith- receiving what He has already done through the fruit of our lips- believing with our heart and confessing with our mouth what Jesus has done.

This goes in line with a word I want you to notice at the end of verse 12 when Jesus said that the father divided to them his "livelihood": What is one's livelihood? It is what they worked for, right? Well, friends, God has made available to us what He has already worked for and earned through the giving of His Son.

So we do not need to work for or earn our inheritance! It is ours by virtue of the new birth and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not our livelihood (i.e. our own works); it is His livelihood (i.e. the finished work of Christ)! He has done all of the work and now His livelihood is our inheritance by His grace. Thank you Jesus!

So just ask- boldly and confidently- fully expecting your Heavenly Father to give good gifts to His children. And, at the same time, be willing to receive from Him all that His Son worked for on the Cross. This pleases the Father- when His children receive His good pleasure which is giving us the kingdom!

A GREAT WAY OFF

Now I want to skip ahead in the parable and notice the father's reaction when his younger son decided to return to his house... Luke 15:20 says that after he saw the light, made the decision to return, and then

backed up that decision with the fruits of repentance, his father was looking for him and saw him while he was “a great way off.” Beloved, this teaches us a very important point- that our Heavenly Father seeks us even when we are a great way off. Thank you, Lord!

Have you ever heard someone respond, when encouraged to receive the Lord’s grace and mercy, “Oh, I have just done too many bad things”, “I have made too many mistakes in my life” or “I’m just too far gone to receive the Lord’s forgiveness”? Perhaps you have said this yourself. This is when we need to look at this one powerful phrase that even when this prodigal son was “a great way off”, his father was looking for him. Wow! That is awesome! In other words, it is not just when you have departed from the Lord a little bit that He seeks you; it is even when you are a “great way off” that His eyes are inclined towards you.

This is important to understand because the devil just loves to feed us that lie that because we have missed it so many times or we have done too many bad things, that forgiveness is no longer an option. But that is a lie from the pit of hell! God is not sitting up in heaven taking account of how many times we have missed it in a certain area and then once we pass that threshold, He won’t grant us mercy any longer. No, saints, I can assure you that we cannot exhaust God’s grace and mercy!

1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that “love thinks no evil.” This word “thinks” is actually an accounting term that literally means to “count or take account of.” So what this verse is saying is that love takes no account of a suffered wrong. In other words, love is not counting and calculating the sins of others against it. So God, who is love, must not be doing this either, amen?

Saints, He is not counting our mistakes! As a matter of fact, He is separating them- as far as the east is from the west- not to remember them anymore! So not only is God not counting or taking account of our sins; they are not even on His desk anymore! He sent the record of them to the shredder- never to be recalled again! Hallelujah!

HOW THE FATHER RESPONDS

Then notice how the father responded after he saw his lost son a great way off... Verse 20 says that when his father saw him, he had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

How many of you have seen those coke zero commercials where the word “and” is emphasized? Well, this is what is being done here! Not only was the father looking for him while he was a great way off and had compassion on him; he also ran to him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him! Praise God! Can you see the picture of our Heavenly Father that is being painted here?

Did you know that God is so in love with you that when He sees you coming- even straight out of the pig pen- He runs to you? No, He does not just sit there and lounge around until you get to Him. He doesn’t just take His time walking to you. Beloved, He runs to you! When I read this, I think of that image of a couple who is so madly in love with each other that they are running through an open field covered with flowers and into each other’s arms. This should illustrate to us just how excited God is about us and how deep His love runs for us! Praise the Lord!

Now I want you to notice how the Father drew near to his son after he saw his son drawing near to Him. This reminds me of James 4:8 which says that when we draw near to God, He draws near to us. So we can clearly see that our Heavenly Father does not make us make the journey back to Him on our own! Praise God! Once we make the decision to repent and make a step or two in the right direction, He meets us on the road and gives us more grace for the journey. In other words, He gives you and me the grace and strength to repent and does not make us do it all on our own. This is the grace of our Heavenly Father!

Then notice how this prodigal son’s father fell on his neck and kissed him! What a beautiful picture of the love of our God! When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. But He does not just draw near to

us complacently; He draws near to us in a full sprint! And then when He gets to us, He embraces us and kisses us. Friends, I can assure you that eye has not seen nor ear heard nor has entered into the heart of man the greatness of God's love for us!

And there are those who say, "Well, I need to clean my act up before I start pursuing God again." But that is not what you see in this parable, is it? No, the father did not wait until his son had a bath and got himself cleaned up before he embraced him and loved on him! He received him and lavished love upon him just as he was. Always remember, **our job is to just draw near to Him when we have allowed our heart to depart from Him; His job is to clean us.**

Then notice what happened when the son begins his rehearsed confession about what he had done and how unworthy he is... In verse 22, it begins with "But the father said to his servants..." Pay special attention to the word "but" at the beginning of this verse because it shows us something very important. It shows us how our Heavenly Father ignores our rehearsed confessions. What He hears is when we make that decision in our heart and have the corresponding actions of repentance. What I am saying is that He is not as interested in our works and the penance that we feel we need to pay such as the repentant statements we feel we need to preface all of our prayers with.

You see, we are the ones who feel that we need to say or do certain things in order to get back in God's good graces. But in many of those cases, God is not interested at all in our tears, words, or actions when we have already prepared our heart to return to Him. All He is interested in is the fact that we are there with Him at that moment talking to Him. It is our flesh that feels like we need to do something other than simply changing our direction.

THE GIFTS OF RECONCILIATION

No, the father did not even acknowledge the son's suggestion to make him like one of his servants, but the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet." Let's look at these three items in detail...

First of all, notice that the Father said to bring out the best robe and put it on him... Now this is an easy analogy to uncover: What do the Scriptures liken a robe to? Righteousness! Righteousness is our robe according to Isaiah 61:10 which says, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with a robe of righteousness."

But I want you to notice that it is not just any robe that this son was clothed with. Luke 15:22 says that the father said to bring out the best robe. Now let me ask you a question: What would have been considered the best robe in the father's house? It would have been the father's very own robe, right? And this is exactly what our Heavenly Father has done for us! **Our Father has not clothed us with just any old righteousness; He has clothed us in His very own righteousness!** Hallelujah! 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that He who knew no sin was made to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. You see, this is not a generic righteousness we have been given; this is the very righteousness of God we have been given! Praise unto His glorious grace!

Notice next of all that the father had his servants bring his younger son a "ring." Now this ring in their days was a symbol of status and authority. They used signet rings in those days, which was essentially their family's checkbook or credit card. So what the father did here is very significant and a good lesson for us...

Notice that this son did not have to work his way back up into the position that he fell from. You see, most of the time we feel that when we have missed it, we have to rebuild God's trust in us again or we will have to wait a period of time before we can expect Him to use us. But, you see, that is just how we think; God's

ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts! The moment we repent and confess, we are immediately restored into the same level of authority and that same level of sonship that we were in during the peak of our walk! Hallelujah! e!

Now that leads me to this last item that the father returned to His son... Last but not least, we see that the father told the servants to put sandals on his feet... Now the very fact that the prodigal son returned home without shoes shows how truly desperate and destitute he had become because only slaves and servants were barefoot in those days. So by the father giving him sandals again shows that because of his great love for his son, he was completely restoring him not just to a place of right standing with Him, not just to a place of authority with Him, but also to a place of sonship with Him. Glory to God!

Not only that, but do you remember when the Lord began to wash His disciples feet at the Last Supper? He came to Peter and Peter's response was for the Lord to not just wash His feet, but to wash all of Him because he wanted all of the fellowship that he could have with the Lord. Well, Jesus responded that only his hands and feet needed to be washed because the rest of Him was already cleansed. This is a beautiful illustration of what has taken place in all of us...

You see, when we make mistakes and fall short of His glory, we do not lose our right-standing with God that we received when we were born again. We remain cleansed by the blood, but it is our hands and our feet- the parts of us that have contact with the world- that need to be cleansed and washed continuously. So what the Lord was teaching His 12 disciples and us is that our position in Him does not change when we sin, but our proverbial hands and feet do need to be sanctified from time to time. Always remember: **Our "do" does not affect our "who."**

And this is what the father did for his prodigal son... By placing sandals back on his feet, he provided him with sanctification (i.e. the grace for sanctification- separation from the filthiness of the world and the empowerment to walk with the Lord). Hallelujah! This is what is so awesome about our Heavenly Father... He doesn't just positionally make us right; He also gives us the strength and ability to live right! In other words, He gives us the grace to walk out who we are in Christ! Why? Because He loves us so much!

Saints, these are such important truths to understand. We need to learn from this parable that we have a Father in heaven who mirrors the father in this parable. And we need to learn that just as this father divided to his children his livelihood, our Heavenly Father has done the same for us! He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and I can assure you that eye has not seen nor ear heard the things which God has prepared for those who love Him! It is the Holy Spirit's job to show us what these things are that God has already given us (1 Cor 2:9&10).

So, if necessary, change your mentality: Begin to present your every need to the Father knowing that He evidently wants to give you your heart's desires. And by all means: Ask in faith and ask big! Also, read the Holy Scriptures and prayerfully inquire of the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what is your inheritance. Then, by faith, receive what has already been purchased for you by the precious blood of Jesus. This brings great pleasure to your Father- when you receive all that He sent His Son to purchase for you. So bring Him pleasure today: ask, believe, and receive! Amen.

Victoriously,

