

Luke 15

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 01 May 2017 12:34

Jesus often spoke sharply to the Pharisees and scribes, because there are times when sharp expressions are needed to cause people to stop and think. Here, Jesus speaks with a more gentle tone to them, that they may at last understand why he had come, and why He spoke as He did. Gently, He related to them the love of the Father. But, as the last parable shows, their inner selves were filled with anger and distrust for their own kinsmen and nation! This is not unlike the anger many Christians harbour against their fellow believers, just because they do not think and act as they do. With the father of the Prodigal, let us rejoice when a fellow believer returns to God in repentance, and not think badly of him.

Verses 1&2

1.

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

2.

And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

It is very likely that the “publicans and sinners” who now thronged Jesus had heard of his response to the Pharisees. They were not too drawn to the hypocrisy that was typical of these blind teachers, and we know that since He began preaching, crowds were amazed by Jesus’ fresh, open, enthralling, speech and action.

In my years of teaching and preaching I have come to see, generally, that the best ‘hearers’ tend to be those who do not claim to be ‘experts’! The most untaught person can often be the most approachable and amenable, because they have no illusions about themselves, and do not pretend to know everything. How different from today’s professors of faith, who claim to know absolutely everything!

The Pharisees could not think of anyone worse than a publican. Automatically, they linked publicans to ‘sinners’ and treated them with disdain and horror. No Jew in his right mind would talk to a publican, let alone *eat* with him! It was simply not done. Sadly, the forest in the Pharisees’ eyes prevented them from seeing their own errors, but they could easily see the

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splinters in everyone else's eyes!

Publicans were the 'lowest of the low', traitors to Israel and friends of the foe (Romans). In the eyes of Pharisees, they were beyond redemption and certainly unworthy to be friendly with. Yet, Jesus did not share the prejudice of the Pharisees. He had eaten with publicans before, attracting the venom of the Pharisees, but this did not deter Him from sharing the Gospel with either Pharisee or publican – each man is a sinner, so, to Jesus, the publicans were no different from Pharisees.

The Pharisees and scribes threw up their arms in feigned horror... here He was again, eating with publicans and other people made despicable by their sins, taking them out of Pharisaical favour. It is true that as Christians we may not freely commune with those who openly sin publicly, but must avoid them and, if necessary, shun them until they repent. But, Jesus Christ is God! He can commune with whomever He wishes. He is not bound by earthly rules or by a form of piety He does not Himself condone.

We may commune with such people in our own day, if our aim is to witness and to preach the Gospel. This, however, was not the view of the hyper-pious Pharisees, whose own souls were as darkened graves, despite the outward appearance of holiness. Many today are like this. Do not be duped by smart talk or mere words... observe them in private and listen carefully!

I have no problem in the company of sinners, when my aim is to witness. Do you? I was once an unsaved sinner, so I am not above any other sinner, no matter how vile they act or speak. Yes, I must at times avoid them or shun them, and speak against their sins, but this does not prevent me from speaking to them of Christ or of God's truth. This is because I do not fear sinners or feel tainted by them, when my own attitude is holy. God is with me, so why fear fellow humans to the point of hating them, as the Pharisees hated publicans and sinners?

Verses 3-7

1.

And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

2.

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety

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and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

3.

And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

4.

And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

5.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Jesus, after hearing the complaints of the Pharisees (again!), spoke to them gently. He knew of their plot to kill Him, and of their hatred for Him, and yet He spoke carefully to them. This is because they were His reason for coming to earth, to save the chosen people. He asked the Pharisees and scribes a simple question: if a man has 100 sheep and loses one of them, does he not search in the desert for it until he finds it? When he finds it, he will pick it up, put it over his shoulders, and rejoice.

When he gets home he calls on his neighbours and friends to rejoice with him, because the lost sheep was found. What a message to the Pharisees, and what a glorious Gospel call to the publicans and sinners. Jesus came to reach the Jews, but the religious leaders were making it seem like a crime. Should they not rejoice if even one of those publicans turned back to God, renewing their faith in the Lord?

Jesus then gave them, and us, a glimpse into the attitude of Heaven... every time a sinner is saved, the whole of Heaven rejoices! Those who are saved ("just" in God's eyes) are already safe, so when a lost one re-enters the fold there is immense joy. Do we feel this joy when another person is saved? When they turn from darkness to light? Or, do we prefer to hate those who are unsaved, thereby displaying the evil in our own hearts, as did the Pharisees?

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Verses 8-10

1.

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

2.

And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

3.

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

This love for the chosen people of God led Jesus to use another illustration for His message: If a woman has ten pieces of silver and loses one, will she not do everything she can to find it... light an expensive candle to shed light into dark corners, sweep the floors, move the furniture, and search until the lost piece is found? Of course she will, because the coin is valuable! Jesus was again telling the Pharisees that He came for the lost, and they ought to be just as concerned for their own kinsmen. When the woman finds the valuable coin she rejoices with her friends. And though Heaven rejoices when even one sinner is saved, the Pharisees preferred to hate sinners, even of their own nation.

In my ministry I often have to oppose and call out against this or that wickedness. But, I do not hate those I speak against. I might intensely dislike what they do, but they are just like I was at one time. I am no better, so I have no business hating them, even if I have to shun them.

Verses 11-16

1.

And he said, A certain man had two sons:

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2.

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

3.

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

4.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

5.

And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

6.

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

Jesus then delivered one of the most famous parables known to the world – the account of the Prodigal Son. A man had two sons and the youngest asked for his share of his inheritance before time. He did not wish to wait and so the foolishness of youth took over his soul. Soon afterwards, the young son gathered up his belongings, took his inheritance money, and went away to a far place, where he lived a life of riot and wantonness.

Recognise this kind of ruinous life? We see it every day in our own cities, towns and villages. We see it in the scandalous and evil night-club scene, the betting shops and sex trade. We see young people destroying themselves with drink, drugs and promiscuity. This is the kind of life the youngest son indulged in.

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But, as always happens, he soon ran out of money. His inheritance was gone, and the country he was in experienced a deadly famine, in which people died of hunger. In desperation, though he once knew a life of wealth, he began work for a man who owned swine. From this one reference, we know the son must have gone to a non-Jewish country, for a Jew would not keep swine. The young son was so far from home and so hungry, he put the issue of touching swine to the back of his mind, ignoring Mosaic law. He even wanted to eat the husks eaten by the swine; he was so hungry, but no-one would give him help or food.

Many students today are like this. They leave a good home and start to live riotously, drinking to excess, clubbing, and doing many things their parents would be horrified by. A previous good home cannot make a young man sane or good when he is far from his parents. And many a Christian has fallen this way when in college, or away from home. When Jesus spoke of the young man 'fainting' or desiring to eat the useless food eaten by swine, he was using a figure of speech that referred to wanting things that were forbidden.

So many modern youth desire after things forbidden. They taste the fruit and discover they are bitter, yet they keep on eating it, because their peers control their minds and hearts, being themselves the dupes of Satan. This sad decline in morals and other virtues can also be found amongst other age groups, and even amongst pastors. They start to experiment with drink, pornography, or illicit relationships (many of which come out of the foolish activity of one-to-one counselling with the opposite sex), but soon find the resultant situation is wicked, requiring repentance and a turning from their sin.

Verses 17-24

1.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

2.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

3.

And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

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4.

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

5.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

6.

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

7.

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

8.

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Thankfully, the young son “came to himself”. The term infers that he had reached a ‘low’ point but that he then shook his mind free of a delusion, and so started to realise his stupidity and sin. (Do not scorn – we can all become like this and can all be reached by God’s mercy). The young man reasoned with himself – what on earth am I doing here like this? Even my father’s servants eat better than me! Here I am starving to death... what is wrong with me! God will often use a sharp shock to bring us to our senses.

The young man decided to overcome his pride, and to return to his father. He would repent before his loving parent and before God and say he was unworthy to be his father’s son, but would be grateful to be made a hired servant. Does this not describe us all? None of us is worthy to belong to God, and yet He makes us his adopted sons and daughters, because of His

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Son's sacrifice, and His own choice of us in Heaven; we are elect and predestined to salvation, even though we have lived foolishly and sinfully, not bothering with truth.

With this humble resolve, the son travelled in his weak state to rejoin his father. The father looked out and saw his son from a long way off. Love welled up in his breast and he ran down the road to meet him. He threw his arms around the son's neck and kissed him gladly. Is this not how the Lord found us? He knew we were sinners, and yet He watched out for us keenly until we turned to Him in the act of rebirth (born again), the gift given by the Holy Spirit. And when we turned to Him He threw His arms around us in love.

The son was overwhelmed and repeated his request to his father – to be treated as a servant. But, the father ignored this request and instead told his servants to kill the fatted calf in his son's honour. He wanted to eat and be merry, for his beloved son had returned. And as a sign of the renewed relationship, the father put a new ring on his son's finger and new shoes on his feet. When we are saved, our Father kisses us, accepts us, and gives us the signs of His love – the indwelling of the Spirit and free access to Himself, through His Son. We inherit Heaven!

Note the terms used: the son was dead but is now alive, was lost but is now found. Jesus meant this to apply to the Pharisees as well as the nation of Israel: the nation was lost (many times), but was then re-owned by God. He loved the nation so much that He sent His only Son to save them from their sins. Would they remain stiff-necked, or repent? The family became merry... what about us? Are we made merry by one who returns to the Lord? Do we know great joy? Or do we secretly 'tut-tut' that one should so openly claim back his place in God's economy?

Note that these parables are NOT about men today being saved, but about the nation of Israel turning back to God in the midst of their sins. It is these people who John the Baptist was sent to. It was who Jesus came to save. The words used give us important indications – in each parable the prime subject belonged to someone (God) and returned to its/his rightful owner.

In each case, the lost one had left God's presence, but then returned; was lost but is now found. Only those who ALREADY belong to God can 'return'! So, if we apply the principles to our own day, it is about Christians who fail and backslide, to sadly partake of many sins, but who then realising their error, returns to God repentant.

Verses 25-30

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1.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

2.

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

3.

And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

4.

And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

5.

And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

6.

But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

The prodigal's older brother had remained at home, working hard on the farm. When the younger brother returned, he was unaware of it until he went home at the end of the day, and heard merriment, music and dancing. He asked a servant what was going on, and was shocked by the answer... the youngest son had returned home, and with joy his father ordered the killing of the fatted calf, for the son was now safe and sound.

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The eldest son was furious! A fatted calf was killed for special occasions, and when there was a condition of plenty. Here was his father rewarding his brother for belong profligate... or so his fury thought. Indeed, his attitude mirrored that of the Pharisees towards sinners. The eldest son was so angry he refused to enter the house and rejoice, so his father came out to ask him to enter.

The eldest son showed his heart to the father – had he not worked solidly when the youngest son went off to enjoy himself? Had he not kept out of trouble, doing everything his father had commanded? And yet, his father did not even give him a small kid so he could make merry with his friends! The bitterness is obvious. Yet, he added, as soon as my brother returns, after living with whores, you killed the fatted calf! It isn't fair! And so the eldest son exemplified how Pharisees thought of themselves and fellow sinners. They could not see that their pretence of holiness was just as bad as the wickedness of open sin.

Verses 31&32

1.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

2.

It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

The father looked upon his petulant son with equal compassion. He looked through the anger and reassured the son (though it would appear he shrugged it off). Son, you are always with me. My youngest son has had his share, and so everything I have is yours. So, why be angry? Your brother was lost and is now found, he was dead to me and is now alive. Surely this is reason for us to rejoice? Surely, we should be glad when those who act foolishly come to their senses?

In these parables Jesus spoke to the hearts of the proud Pharisees, showing them that they, too, were like the youngest son; they had gone off on their own paths misinterpreting the love of God. If they only returned repentant, God would accept him back gladly.

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Of course, the same applies to all of God's elect children, if they repent and return from their sins. We all slide away from God at some time, and if it were not for His mercy, we would be forever lost. But, because we are elect we can never be lost, for He promises to keep us safe in His hand forever, even when we sin. Jesus could do no more for these people; He extended the hand of God to them and they refused to take it. Return to the Lord when you can – for the open hand of God may not remain open for long, even to His elect. When the hand is withdrawn, the elect can expect a life of emptiness and misery, even though, at the end, they will enter Heaven.

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