



Luke 15:25-32

Justice Isn't What You Need

25 "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 "So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.

29 "So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.

30 'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.

32 'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' "

There are three words that every parent learns to dread hearing from their kids. Now some of you may be saying "Are we there yet?" is four words and "*Mine*" is only one. But neither of those are the words I'm referring to. Those three dreaded words are "*That's not fair!*"

Kids have the capacity to act like little union shop stewards in assessing inequities in their "workplace" and then demanding that their grievances be addressed.

They can spot, for instance, minute differences between the sizes of two cookies that seem identical to adult eyes. They have little chronometers that allow them to know exactly how long their siblings were allowed to play a video game. They can tell exactly how much reward or attention their brother or sister has earned by their performance, and will let you know immediately if you grievously err by exceeding that boundary either verbally using the "*that's not fair*" mantra or if they are more subtle, by the ever popular "sulk."

But it never seems to occur to them that their relationship to their parents is one of fundamental *inequity* from the very beginning! I mean we never do it, but a parent hearing "*that's not fair!*" could step back and say

"Fair? Well of course its not *fair!* Since when do you think that you actually earned anything close to the fair market value of the benefits you receive? Do you really think that carrying the trash out once in a while or answering the phone, comes close to covering even a fraction of the overall cost of feeding you, clothing you, educating you, keeping a roof over your head, ferrying you around the town, and paying your doctor's bills? And how exactly do you expect to pay for all the changed diapers, the treated and kissed owwies, the laundry, the lessons, the application

of discipline, the cuddles when you didn't feel well, and then not dropping you on your head when you interrupted those cuddles to use us as giant living splat mats. My son and or daughter, you have grown up entirely depending that *fair* will never be the standard applied to your life in this household.

You see this isn't a workplace, it's a home. Love, Grace, Patience and Forgiveness – rather than strict justice – are of most importance around here."

It's not fair, is essentially what the Father in this parable is hearing from his older Son. In the Parable, the Father is God, and the Older Son are the Scribes and Pharisees who complained way back in verse 2 that Jesus was receiving and eating with sinners.

Jesus has already explained *why* he receives these sinners in the first part of the parable in verses 11-25. These sinners are the prodigals, the wastrels who turned their back on God, the Bible, and the Church and plunged deep into sinful lifestyles, but whose eyes have been opened, who have been convicted of their sins, and who have now repented and returned. They are those who were formerly dead in sins and are now alive in Christ, who were formerly lost and in danger of eternal hellfire and are now found and have been saved.

Now Jesus turns his attention to the very Pharisees who did the complaining, and by means of the parable, warns them of their own situation using the example of the older brother.

The older brother was out toiling in the field, and on approaching his father's house he is surprised to hear the sounds of celebration. So he asks a servant "*what's all this commotion about*" When he hears that it a party to celebrate the return of *his brother* the notorious sinner, he is outraged! He won't go in to His father's house.

Just so the Scribes and Pharisees were appalled that anyone claiming to be the Messiah would go to terrible sinners and freely offer them the Good News, that simply by repenting and believing in the Christ they might receive free and full forgiveness of all their sins and enter into the kingdom of God.

The Pharisees want nothing to do with such a message. You see *that isn't fair*, those big sinners have done nothing to merit heaven. They deserve only hellfire. So if the tax collectors and the harlots are entering into the kingdom, they are going to stay outside and fume and complain.

Now this is the amazing thing. The father doesn't say, "well if he is proud and foolish enough to refuse salvation and stay outside, let him perish. His blood be on his own head" The father loves even this proud and self-righteous man, so He goes to him and pleads with him. In the same way, Jesus was sent to preach the gospel to the Pharisees as well as the Tax Collectors.

But what is the answer the Older Son gives to this message of free grace? Verse 29 "Lo, these many years I have been serving you." Now the word translated "serving" there is actually *duleo*. It doesn't mean serving, it means *slaving*. So the NIV translation here is a little better: "**Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.** "

And there's the key to the terrible problem with the understanding of the Older Brother and of the religion of the Pharisees. It is a religion of slavery rather than sonship. They didn't understand what being a Son or a Father meant, which is why they couldn't understand why anyone would rejoice at the

return of a sinner. From their point of view they were just *bad servants, runaway slaves*. They hadn't earned their keep and were worthy only of a beating.

From the older brother's point of view, the Father was a master, and he had "kept His Commandments" – the Pharisees actually thought they merited their salvation by keeping the law, you hear that in the preposterous reply of the rich young ruler when the commandments were put before Him by Christ ***"All these things I have kept from my youth."***

I earned my reward by slaving away. Now brothers and sisters, many things are called falsely called *legalism* today, but that really is legalism, thinking that by your works, in whole or in part, you earn or maintain your salvation.

This is not grace or mercy it is the reward due to work - and sadly that is the way the natural man the unconverted man generally views all religion. *I earn whatever I receive by slaving away.* No wonder the older brother is unhappy! He's trapped in a loveless slave relationship with no real relationship to the religion of scripture. I read a quote just yesterday that sums up that applies that kind of thinking perfectly, it was from a Muslim Imam on the island of Aceh in Indonesia explaining why God sent the Tsunami (predictably he didn't think it was because Indonesian Muslims killed over 10,000 Christians between 1999 and 2003):

"God is angry with Aceh people, because most of them do not do what is written in the Koran and the Hadith," the collected sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad, explained Cut Bukhaini, 35, an imam. "I hope this will lead all Muslims in Aceh to do what is in the Koran and its teachings. If we do so, God will be merciful and compassionate."

Imagine a family where the love of your Father *depended* on your doing the dishes, and mowing the lawn, and taking out the garbage. And if you missed doing them enough, you might wind up kicked out of the house or worse. That would be a family that understood neither grace, nor, fatherhood, nor Sonship, and that sadly is Islam and the religion of the scribes and Pharisees.

Now not only is the Older Son depending on his works to earn him his just rewards, he is incensed at the unfairness of the Father *celebrating* the return of the other son. *It isn't fair!* So what does he do? He acts the part of Satan, the accuser, and notice he doesn't call him "My Brother" he calls him "This Son of Yours"

'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

What has he done? He's done what Satan does, he protests that to save such an unworthy sinner would be *unfair, unjust.* *And then he throws up all the awful things the sinner has done.* It's the scene in Zechariah 3:1 ***Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.***

2 The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"

And then he complains, it isn't fair, because I never got a celebration like that and here I've earned it not like *him!*

The Father replies though, don't you see, I've been offering the kingdom to you and everything in it, freely, all you had to do was accept it as a gracious gift. The kingdom has come near, and I've sent out my messenger saying *"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price."* But you still insist on trying to earn it, to buy your salvation by works.

Many a Christian is working under this understanding and that is why they are desperately unhappy, desperately bitter, desperately unassured!

No wonder you are desperately unhappy!

A Scottish Pastor related the tale of his first journey to the USA just after WW2

He just had enough money for the ticket and the cost of the journey to Southampton

Dufflebag stuffed with oatcakes and crackers

8 day journey

Smell of cooking tantalized him.

Down to almost nothing

Met someone who said they had not seen him at any of the meals. Said he couldn't afford it.

MEALS are included in the price of the ticket.

It was all there for him, already purchased, yet he ate none of it, because he thought he had to buy it!

APPLICATIONS:

1) Do not think that Salvation is something you can earn: Eph.2:8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."*

All you need do to be saved is repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are saved not in the least part by your works, they are the result of your salvation not the grounds of it. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

2) Never join the Pharisees in despising the sinners entering into the church. Never envy anyone their spiritual benefits or their joy of salvation, now there is a sin going all the way back to Cain and Abel! Never join Satan in throwing up the sins of those whom Christ has redeemed – even when that person is you.

Psalm 103:10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;

12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Join in celebrating the redemption of big sinners: It was **right** that we should make merry and be glad,

Rev. 12:10-11 10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

11 "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

- 3) Remember it is not fairness and justice we need. Justice is everyone goes to hell. It is unmerited mercy we need, and that doesn't come via simply being in the Church, it comes via a saving relationship with Jesus. Kids remember that, you are like that older brother, born into the church, but you too will remain outside the house unless you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus leaves the story hanging doesn't he? What doesn't he tell you?