

## **THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL BROTHER Pt. 2**

In the first part of this study, we examined what the Bible has to say about 'Brothers'. We focused on the key concept 'Am I my brother's keeper', and saw that the answer as far as God is concerned, is a resounding Yes. Scripture clearly shows His attitude toward 'brothers' and the consequences when we fail to uphold His standards. With this foundation, we must now consider one more key issue before turning our attention to the actual parable. Central to understanding the total message of the parable, is an awareness of the topic of 'Inheritance', as used in scripture.

In the OT, it was not only the frequent cause of contention, but in many places, the finer points of that inheritance, were set out in great detail, much like we would write a Will today. What is important to remember, is that you normally only inherit when someone dies. Their possessions are then passed on to you. Sometimes, a portion of this anticipated inheritance was given prior to the death of the owner as an 'earnest' of that inheritance.

The Greek 'arrabon' (728) is a first payment on a purchase which obligates the purchaser to make further payments. A payment made in advance, it secures legal claim to an article or validates a sales contract before the full price is paid. This word is usually translated 'earnest' in the NT. Today, we would call it a down- payment.

*2 Cor 1:*

*21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; (Note that the anointing comes from God, not man.)*

*22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*

*2 Cor 5:*

*5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. (This is a part of our Heavenly Inheritance.)*

*Eph 1:*

*13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,*

*14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the **purchased** possession, unto the praise of his glory. (It was purchased at Calvary.)*

However, what is of real significance here, is not the question of material inheritance which dominates part of the OT, but the far more important spiritual inheritance which is the focus of the NT. This is the inheritance that we can claim, through Christ. The spiritual of the NT was foreshadowed with the material of the OT. Whenever we read of this, be sure the ultimate reference is to our eternal salvation and life in God's kingdom.

*(Eph 1:11 KJV) In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

*(Eph 1:18 KJV) The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*

Remember, an inheritance is always associated with ‘death’. In order to obtain your full inheritance, someone must die.

*(Heb 9:15 KJV) And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

*(1 Pet 1:4 KJV) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,*

Note, both Christ had to die and our inheritance is reserved for us in Heaven. Until Christ returns, death is our only way of obtaining this inheritance. Scripture also gives us a warning which is relevant to the focus of this study, the Prodigal.

*(Eph 5:5 KJV) For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

Let us now turn our attention to the actual parable.

*Luke 15:*

*11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:*

*12 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.*

*13 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.*

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

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

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

*17 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!*

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

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

*20 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.*

*21 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.*

*22 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:*

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

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

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

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

*27 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.*

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

*29 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:*

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

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

*32 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.*

Let me ask you a question. Where in a parable do we usually find the most important part, the key message? The end, or last part isn't it. There are many great messages around based on the first section of this parable, but very little has been written about the last few verses. I will attempt to address this here.

It is not my intention here to discuss the first part of this parable, the lessons are many and varied, but all show the love, compassion and forgiveness available to us from the Father when we come to Him with true repentance. Rather, I wish to focus on verses 25-32.

I think it should be fairly clear, that the brother represents both Christians and by extension, the church itself. He has coming to him, the major portion of the inheritance from the father; he is a part of the household and beloved of the father; he has done all things correctly; he continues to serve his father.

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

Note where the elder brother was, *in the field*. What does the field represent? Matthew 13:38, tells us the field is the world. The field, is where we plant the good seed, water and eventually harvest. It is where we as part of God's church work. The elder brother was out in the field working. He was a good, faithful son/Christian, out about his father's business. On the surface, at least, he appears to be a model Christian.

On a side note, it must have been a wild party if he could actually hear the dancing, as well as the music. This surely is symbolic of the rejoicing in heaven when one who was lost, is found and returns with a repentant heart.

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

*27 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.*

We should expect from a model Christian, from someone who represents the church, that he would be overjoyed at the safe and repentant return of his brother. Surely we would be if a fallen brother returned seeking forgiveness. After all, that's what the Bible commands as we saw in the first part of this study. However, see his reaction to the news.

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

He was angry. Why? Is it jealousy, human nature raising its ugly head, or is there a subtler message here? Probably a little of all three. Part of the answer, is evident in the next verse.

*29 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:*

How often, do we take people for granted? True, we could argue that perhaps the elder son should have asked at some time for a party, but let's examine this realistically. Don't we all, as the Bible points out, often make more of a fuss over the redemption of the one lost sheep than we do over those who have never strayed. Is there a message here, that we should be more sensitive to the needs of everyone, especially those whom it is so easy to take for granted because they always do the right thing and are not a cause for continual concern. So often, enormous time and energy is spent dealing with problems and problem people in a church, that the rest of the congregation can feel ignored.

Yes, the elder son was loved and appreciated by his father, but perhaps the father hadn't expressed those feelings enough, or even at all. Perhaps he'd just assumed his son knew it. How often have we fallen into the same trap.

The other point to consider in these verses, is the fact that the Father came out to entreat with the son. Isn't this so like our Heavenly Father who continually entreats with us. It's not that we love Him, but that He first loved us. Who always takes the first step? He does, no matter how stubborn we sometimes are. God always reaches out to His people; He is faithful, even when we aren't.

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

One question fairly leaps off the page here; how did the elder brother know that the other son had wasted his money on harlots? Obviously, he'd either sent people to spy on him, or he'd heard from others who had visited him, that this was the situation. However, the father seems not to care; the sin had been dealt with, forgiven and forgotten. When our sin is forgiven, it is removed as far as the east is from the west.

Interesting isn't it though, that it is the brother who brings the accusation, who spreads the gossip in the name of righteous anger. He obviously feels justified in doing so, but in reality, is he? Are we also justified in similar situations? Worse, do we do the same thing sometimes? Should we? I leave these questions for you to ponder. Just remember, the elder son represents the church. Therefore, we as part of the 'church' must learn from this incident. There is a challenge here, how will we respond?

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

*32 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.*

Note first, that the father offers no rebuke to his son. In fact, he makes two very important statements which on a spiritual level apply to us. *“thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.”*

Our inheritance is secure and that is far more important than a brief hour or two of celebration. If we are to rejoice in anything, let it be that our names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Yes, perhaps the elder brother did not have the perfect ‘Christian’ response to the news of his brother’s return, but note the aim of the father in all this. Reconciliation. There was first reconciliation between the father and the Prodigal son, and then I’m sure, eventual reconciliation with the brother. That is God’s plan; that’s what He wants, that is what the entire Bible is about. From cover, to cover it is a Book about reconciliation between God and man.

Do we need to be reconciled with God? Unless we are already Christians and saved/born again, absolutely. Must we be reconciled with our brothers? As I illustrated in Part one of this study, the answer is the same; absolutely. You are your brother’s keeper. God will always do His part. As I’ve already pointed out, it was the father who came out to reason with his son. We, therefore, must be prepared to do ours. Is there a brother you need to be reconciled with today? If so, do it without delay, then come in and join the celebration. A table prepared by your Heavenly Father awaits you.