

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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The Heart of Our Farther

Matthew 15:25-32

15:25 “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

15:26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

15:27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’

15:28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,

15:29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

15:30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’

15:31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

15:32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

Our heavenly Father shows His love anywhere in the Bible, very clearly, but the most famous story would be “The Prodigal Son” in Luke 15. Some people may think this is the story of a bad son, but the central character is the father, rather than the son. In Luke 15, Jesus talked three times about “things lost.” First one was the “lost sheep,” then “lost silver coin,” and finally “the lost son.” As you already

know, every story describes the joy of who found them. We could see the analogy here; the shepherd who found the sheep is Jesus Christ, the lady who found the silver coin is the Holy Spirit, and the Father who welcomed “the prodigal son” is our heavenly Father. This story teaches us about the Love of Father God.

1. Farther and Younger Son

For the beginning, we should learn the mind of God from the figure of father who welcomed the son. “The prodigal son” was the younger son. At this time, for the most cases the first-born son was qualified as the heir of the family. Then the younger one thought, “My older brother would take everything possession of our father sooner or later, and I will have no place in the family. Now, I ask my father to give the heritages to me before he dies.” The younger son took action and required his father to give him advancement; although it meant the “breakdown” of their relationship, thus, he is no longer the son. He chose heritages than the bond of father and son, then went out his home.

However, the son had no money because of his lavish expenditure in the country far away. He finally took care of pigs, though the Jewish people were prohibited to touch the animal by the laws. He was truly hungry and even craved for the food of pigs. He was at the bottom of everything and then remember what is important, and said, “How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of

your hired servants.”(in Luke 15:17-19) He knew he was no longer the son of his father, at the time he asked advancement. If he made just a little accomplishment by the advancement, or lived nicely and properly, he was not as ashamed as this statement. However, he was just playing around and lavishly wasted his heritage and his life. He was not worthy to be called as the son. He knew it, and make up his mind to ask the forgiveness of his sins to his father. “And, he arose and came to his father.”

The appearance of the son coming to his father would be truly ragged and seedy. However, his father found the son and ran sooner than the son found the father. In Luke 15:20, as it say, “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” It is not the coincidence that the father found the son sooner, because the father went outside every day, looked around to find the way his son would come back, and waited for his son every time. At this time, the master of the wealthy house clothed with long sleeves, and it was not easy to run with such clothes. They walked slowly to appeal their authority. Yet the father ran with this cloth, caring not the richly long sleeves.

Moreover, the father at this time would never have welcomed the son who had sinned against. Outside the house, looking the son down, the most of fathers might say, “Why are you here? Do you want to say something? I allow you to talk.” Now look at this father. The son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” And, when the son was about to say, “Treat me as one of your hired servants,” the father slapped the words and ordered the servants, “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on

him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.”(Luke 15:22)
The best robes, rings, and shoes are what the son has, and not servants. The father welcomed the son as his truly son.

Everyone who reads this story may figure out that the prodigal son is us; and the father is the Father God. God created us as who is loved by God and who love God. However, people don't recognize God's love and sinned against him. We said we didn't need God and His love, and we loved ourselves than God, wanted to be praised, and chose selfish and lavish life. We would not waste likewise this prodigal son, but our mind was not worthy to be called as children of God. Even so, God loved us still. He is waiting for one step for coming back to God. It is that we recognize our sins and repent them; ask the forgiveness, stand up and come back to God. As long as we took only one step, God run to us and welcome us as His children.

The love of God is described here in the form of stories and analogies, but the love of God is not fiction. God sent the truly beloved Son, Jesus Christ to this world and through His Cross and Resurrection, He in fact saved the sinners from the bottom of evil to forgive and accept. Everyone who believe in Jesus Christ and come back to God, are experiencing the greatest and deepest love in the arms of God.

2. Farther and Older Son

Secondly, let's learn the heart of God, our Father, from what the father of the prodigal son did for his older son. We tend to forget the older son when we read the story of the prodigal son, but the older son is not mere addition to the story. As Jesus started the story saying,

“There was a man who had two sons,” the older son is an important figure of the story.

When the older son came back from the field, he heard music and dancing from the house. He asked one of the servants what these things meant. The servant answered him that was the celebration for the younger son. The older son was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and tried to entreat him, but he said to his father, “Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!”(Luke 15:29-30) As his words of protest against the father showed, the older son thought that his father was mean and strict person who was not generous with even a goat. The older brother worked hard under his father, but he never understood and love his father. He couldn't rejoice with his father.

In this story, the younger son describes “the tax collectors and sinners,” and the older son points “the Pharisees and the scribes.” The Pharisees and the scribes thought that the Kingdom of God was worthy for them, and the tax collectors and sinners never go in the Kingdom of God. However, is there anyone who is qualified for the Kingdom of God by nature? Who has achieved good works that could cancel his/her sins and has complete character that would be accepted immediately into the Kingdom of God? No one is there on the earth. All of us, without any exceptions, can go to the place where God is, and be with Him, only through the forgiveness by God's grace and mercy. The gate of the Kingdom of God opens only for those who

knew their sins and repented them. The joy of the Kingdom of God is the joy of repentance. It's the ultimate joy given for those who repented their sins. It's also the greatest joy for God. There will be more joy in heaven if one sinner repent. (Luke 15:7)

Like the older son said "I never disobeyed your command," the Pharisees and the scribes insist their righteousness. Like the older son never called his younger brother "my brother", but called him "this son of yours, who has devoured your property with prostitutes." The older son refused his brother saying, "He is not my brother." And he kept standing outside the house in darkness. The Pharisees and the scribes also never came into the joy of the Kingdom of God.

First I said that there were three lost things in Luke 15, but there might be actually four. The older brother never went to a far country like the younger one did. He has been stayed with his father, but his heart was far from his father's. The older son didn't know and accepted the father's love and was far from the love. The older brother was also the lost one as the younger one had been once before he came back home. I think there are many people like the older brothers. They don't deny faith in Christ, but never come into the joy of believing and trusting Him. They stay don't answer God's invitation, but God never gives up. In the story the father talked to the older son, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."(Luke 15:31-32) The father came to him standing up the celebration for his younger son. Both of the younger son and the older son were equal for the father's love. Therefore, the father eagerly talked to the older one as if he was

pleading for mercy to his older son.

Whenever I read this verses, I recall the verses in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20. It says, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” God has established the reconciliation for the forgiveness of sin by the Cross of Jesus Christ, and He is making a plea and imploring us to accept the reconciliation. Luke 15 ends by the words of the father to the older son. The answer of the older son is not written there. I think each of us should write the continuing dialogue. What will be your conclusion of the story? Listen to the appeal of love by God, our Father, and answer it. Let’s go into the joy of heaven.

(Prayer)

God, our Father, we are so grateful for your loving heart to us. You are inviting us to the joy of the forgiveness of sin by your love. Make your loving heart our heart. Bind us in the bond of your love, and lead each of us to life in love. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ.