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Today we will talk about the father. What do we learn about him? We learn forgiveness, from the elder brother we learn reconciliation. So, let's look at the younger son who says,

Luke 15:19 (ESV) I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

The whole idea of not being worthy to be the son and being treated as the father brings him in and makes him son again is very-very important, because sonship is basically something that reflects values, character and beliefs. So, a son would be basically carrying on the values of the family, the character of the family, the beliefs of the family and basically it is very important that the family be kept together and not distribute the wealth across because otherwise within two generations all the land will be gone. You need a certain economy of scale, that's why family is important, sonship is important. A son is supposed to reflect the father. Each of us bear a family likeness. Ephesians 1:4 says

4. even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

So as Christians when we reflect our father, we reflect who he is and the number one thing that he is holy and he is blameless and he is set apart and that is our destiny as well. This is very unique because if you look back in those days into Greek Mythology the place of man is not son. For example, Prometheus creates man from dust and Athena comes and she puts the soul into man. Man is basically a servant of the gods. The Greek god Zeus didn't like the creation of man, so he created woman and this first woman was called Pandora. Pandora has a box that has all sorts of evil in the world and because she opened the box all the evil spirits came out of the box and they try to destroy man. It is a bit like the Adam and Eve story, but this is Greek mythology. Basically, man figures very lowly in their sights.

Enuma Elish is an early Babylonian epic. It is a first creation story in Mesopotamia where the first civilization was and basically the creation of man is when Marduk cuts the sea water monster called Tiamat into half. Half goes and become heaven, the other half becomes earth and the defender of Tiamat called Kingu. He cut this Kingu, his blood came out and became man. So, the view of non-Christian religions towards man at that time is that man is basically a servant of the gods and man is

basically made to serve gods and be slaves and make gods happy as it were. In Christianity, it is completely different. Paul writes,

Galatians 3:25-29 (ESV) But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you **are all sons of God**, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, **there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus**. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

This is Paul and he is not saying that there is no biological differences or character differences between man and woman, what he is saying is that there is no longer any barrier between everyone because in Christ you are all made sons of God as it were. Now the woman will be upset, what about daughters? You know, the whole movement that you want to make woman inclusive even in the Bible, why should you call God He. The whole idea of son instead of daughters is because Paul is being subversive. Sons are the ones who inherit, daughters do not inherit anything. So, by calling the females sons, it is actually elevating to a level of equality with man and that's very subversive because in those days nobody will say, a daughter is a son of the family. This is actually very revolutionary. The church is a bride of Christ including the men. So, these are all basically metaphors that God uses.

Being a son gives us deep security, we are adopted and if you look in ancient culture, Emperor Hadrian had no heirs so therefore he adopted Antonius Pius who adopted Marcus Aurelis and Lucius Verus and the adoption gives you deep security because you are son and Marcus Aurelis became emperor. So, when you adopt someone is equal in status as it were as the actual son, so it gives you deep security. Slave compared to a son is huge. You can kick out your employee as they don't perform well, but you cannot kick out your son.

Bob Kilpatrick told a story of his father, Auggie, who actually went through a lot of rage in his life because he was brought up as an orphan and every Saturday all the orphans will lineup and then they will wear their Sunday best and all the people will come and choose kids for themselves. Everybody got chosen except poor Auggie was left behind, nobody chose Auggie, nobody wanted him and because of that his father grew up a very-very angry man. It really affected his whole life. How you grow up affects how you live? When you are adopted there is a huge sense of security. You are adopted in Christ as it were, in his love.

There are three steps when you become a Christian;

- You are spiritually regenerated
- You are justified
- You are adopted as sons

Best illustration of this is John F. Kennedy. His son usually comes into his office and play under his table. His son can walk in anytime he likes. This is what we are as sons of God as it were. In other religions you have a huge sense of distance. Here we learn about prayer. We are able to pray because we actually are sons of God.

Luke 11:5-8 (ESV) And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his **impudence** he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

So, it is shameless persistence. If you persist, you have access to God, He will answer your prayers. Paul says,

Romans 8:14-16 (ESV) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Abba Father is an intimate term where a child can call the father Papa. So, all these are pictures of what restoring to sonship is. Lastly, sonship has future hope.

Luke 15:22-24 (ESV) But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and **put a ring on his hand**, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

The ring is a signature ring, so whenever you sign a contract then you put wax there and you affix that official chop. This says that he is a full heir of the father.

Romans 8:16-17 (ESV) 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 **and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

God is the creator of the entire universe and the son will inherit it and the co-heir will be us. This is picture after picture of how beautiful sonship is in our lives.

Revelation 21:7-8 (ESV) 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be **my son**.

One day when we will die and be with Christ in heaven, the divine DNA will be transfused into us, we will have new bodies in a resurrection body again.

Lastly, we have got community. If we look at the first church,

Acts 2:44-45 (ESV) 44 And all who believed were together and had **all things in common**. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

So, this is a reflection of the fact that they were being sons in the same community. In fact, there is a non-Christian called Lucian of Somasata, who actually said that

"Their founder persuaded them that they should be like brothers to one another and so they despised their own privacy and viewed all their possessions as common property"

This is a testimony from a non-Christian who hated Christians. So, they are actually in one community and they are transparent to each other. In a Christian church, you are not here, and your cell group and you choose all the good and nice people, because that is not correct. You don't have a choice when you choose your brothers and sisters in Christ. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are no different from those problem teenagers. When you are in a church and you are in a cell group, you are going to interact with them, their problem becomes your problem and that's how you work through these issues and actually be a true community where there is transparency and your family is the one that most influences your personality. It most influences how you think, how you behave and how you act. Your church should be that family that will impact how you think, how you behave and how you act. You have a claim on each other. You cannot walk away.

When you come to this church, you have a claim on each other. A family is a community, a family has a claim on each other, a family is transparent and that's what we want to see in all the young and old people. My problem becomes your problem and your problem becomes my problem and that's how we reflect the body of Christ. So, the father is a picture of forgiveness. He is the one that forgives and forgiveness is assertive, sacrificial, powered from inside and it leads to reconciliation.

FORGIVENESS IS ASSERTIVE

Luke 15:20 (ESV) And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a **long way off**, his father saw him and felt compassion, and **ran and embraced him and kissed him**.

This is going to be the hardest lesson to learn today. All of us struggle with it. The father saw the son coming back, he didn't quite know whether the fellow coming back for money or coming back for repentance. With the sight of his son, the father takes the initiative of going to him. The son was wrong, and he should have taken the initiative first. Many of us will not reach out to the person who hurt us because they must reach out first. It is a subversive story and this thing tells us that they did wrong to you but you are the first one to reach out, totally subversive, totally

counterintuitive. This is what the father did. So, forgiveness is assertive, it runs, it takes the initiative.

Matthew 5:23-25 (ESV) So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Here if you look, the elder son was angry

Luke 15:28-31 (ESV) But he was angry and refused to go in. His **father came out and entreated him**, **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. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

The father goes outside and begs the son to come in. It is a difficult thing for a lot of us, Japanese people will never do it. Here the father comes out and loses his face. So, what happens when you have something against someone

Matthew 18:15 (ESV) If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

So basically, when someone has something against you, you have to go and talk to him and when you have something against someone, you have to go and talk to him. So basically, it is always your move first. All of us wait for the one who hurt us to come to you, until you encounter the revolutionary teaching of the prodigal son and if Christianity is real, if you experience the real power of the Holy Spirit then it is your move first, because there are so many of us who have got grudges. The Bible tells us that if the Holy Spirit is real in your life and it is radical, it will be your move first. It is always your move.

FORGIVENESS IS SACRIFICIAL

Luke 15:20 (ESV) And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and **ran and embraced him and kissed him**. Luke 15:21-22 (ESV) And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' **22** But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put **a ring on his hand**, and shoes on his feet.

There is a social debt which is loss of face and there is a financial debt, he put the ring back on his son's hand, even though he squandered one third of the money away. So the father came out and entreated the first son. So there is a social cost.

So forgiveness is absorbing the pain instead of inflicting it. All of us would like to inflict the pain and is powered from inside. The father saw him and felt compassion, it is powered from inside our heart.

John 1:9-11 (ESV) The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and **his own people did not receive him.**

Jesus is an example of the father who comes out and sacrifices himself. The reason why we don't sacrifice ourselves is because we feel we are morally superior. We cannot forgive other people because we are superior to them. They cheated you. Who was right? You are right. Who is wrong? They are wrong. Who is superior? Me. Who is inferior? You. Why? You stole my lunch. You see, all unforgiveness stems from one person feeling morally superior than the other person. In my own life, there are so many areas in my life that I cannot reconcile with that person because he hurt me and because he is morally inferior to me and that's it. So, we need to get through this issue of being morally superior. The secret to forgiveness is to resist superiority and release from liability.

What happens is that, when the gospel comes in and you look at your life in terms of righteousness and sin, you are no more morally superior because even your good deeds are actually sinful, so therefore when we lose moral superiority, we are able to forgive. So, the important thing is the blockage to forgiveness is moral superiority and not only that we hold other people liable to us. Everybody owes me because he hurt me. But when Jesus dies on the cross, Jesus pays your debt. So therefore, you don't chase others, because already cleared your big debt. That allows you to basically let people go. So that's the secret to forgiveness.

Mark 11:25 (ESV) And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

FORGIVENESS BRINGS RECONCILIATION

How do you know you harbor a grudge?

The best way to know is that when you think of someone, do you replay in your mind like a video all the bad things he did to you. So, when you replay that we cannot reconcile. So, what happens is that, when we look at all our people in our lives, even in church, we see people and we give names to them like lazy, rude, liar, selfish, dishonest. We are basically labelling people. It is human psychology, we put labels because it gets easier for us to process. That's what we do but when we actually look at ourselves, we always give excuses. So, everybody has a label except us and that's why we cannot forgive each other.

So, when we come to FBC, it shouldn't be a First Baptist Club. Some of us don't want to get involved in other people's life. If we do like that, we are not a church. In a church, you actually experience real community. We cannot be like this. I have done this a lot of times in church too. I tend to turn my face away from people, but that's not community. Community is breaking down those barriers and releasing people from the past. The gospel is the only thing that can release us and we treat each other based on not what we have done in the past, we treat each other based on what we will be in the future. You will be sons of God, you will inherit the universe. So, you are treated as if what you are going to be in the future, you are not treated from the past. So, in church, the thing that can release us is forgiveness from the past and the gospel is the only thing that can do that, because it gives you a future. So that you can actually forget the past. So, if you have difficulty forgiving, remember the gospel.

THE ELDER BROTHER

This fellow is lost, and he doesn't even know it. His brother comes back, and he gets upset

Luke 15:28-30 (ESV) But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 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. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

So therefore, he is very-very-very upset and he is actually spiritually lost.

Luke 15:31-32 (ESV) And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

He is upset because when the younger brother come back, the father gave him one third. When he comes back and become son again, the elder son share becomes less by another one third. So why was he really upset? He is really upset because he is going to lose money. So, his idolatry is what, he loves the father's money, he doesn't love the father himself. He wants the father to be humiliated.

So, the context is, he was morally superior. He stays at home, he is an obedient son, he never went away, he never rebelled. The bad son went away and spent all the family money and so therefore he is morally inferior. So therefore, he should not be treated the same way as the morally superior person like me, but if you dig a little bit deeper both of them sin against the father in a different way. This fellow stayed at home but he actually loves the father's things rather than the father himself and the reason why Jesus told this parable is the context. The context is the pharisees,

they didn't want Jesus, they were upset that Jesus was spending time with the tax collectors. So, they criticize him. So, who is actually the pharisees? The elder brother. So, Jesus's story reflects this. They are actually spiritually lost but they didn't know it. You can see in the lost sheep; the shepherd goes and redeems the sheep. In the lost coin, the woman goes out to redeem the coin. In the lost son, the father goes out to redeem. It was a family tradition that the brother should go and redeem the brother, but the brother failed.

So therefore, when Jesus goes to share the gospel with the poor and the tax collectors, the pharisees should have been happy because he is doing what they should have done in the first place. So, looking for the true elder brother. When you look for the true elder brother today, it has to be Jesus, because the third parable if you have got the real elder brother, he would have been the one looking for his brother. Jesus is our true elder brother who gave up his life and gave up his fortune to sacrifice for the younger brother. So, these are all the lessons of the prodigal son. It is absolutely brilliant the way it is told.

FARMER ON SERVANTHOOD

You need to forgive and reflect the father, you need to basically search for the lost.

Luke 17:1-10 (ESV) **1** And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! **2** It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. **3** Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, **4** and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

So, the moral of story is this, Jesus is teaching them something. The spiritual principle here is that we are neither to give offense nor to take offense. That means when temptations come, if we misbehave in such a way that other people are stumbled by us, this is disaster. The other one is pay attention to yourself, if your brother sins against you and he comes back and he asks you for forgiveness seven times, you know he is bluffing but you still forgive him. So basically, what he is saying is that you are not supposed to give offense or to take offense. That's why a lot of people don't like to evangelize, because they say people like me are so imperfect. So, most of us will never talk about Jesus because we don't even live up to the gospel. So, a lot of us feel that we have lost this right because we live inconsistently.

The trouble is what Jesus is saying, you can't live in a world in such a way that you look after yourself and don't care about others. Jesus is saying something very-very difficult. He is saying that you have got to live in such a way that other people are not tempted. You have got to cleanup your act, you are accountable to God how you live and not only that you don't cause offense and you also don't take

offense. That means your life is very difficult. It is controlled by what other people think. The Western idea is, I live the way I feel, I am free, I do as I like and to hell with all of you. Jesus is saying that you have got to live in such a way that others are not stumbled by you or tempted by you because if they go away from the kingdom of God because of you, you are worse. It is a life that is really circumscribed and structured by the expectations and the behaviors of other people and some people have got false expectation.

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

Some people with different churches thinks that if I have got little bit of faith, I can say to the mountain jump into the river and it will go, but that's taking the whole verse out of context. Jesus is talking about living the Christian life in such a way that you are accountable to other people, so that they don't get stumbled by you, nor do you stumble other people. That means your life is a bit no longer born free. You are freed by the gospel, but you are also a slave of everybody's opinions. It is very hard to do.

Luke 17:7-10 (ESV) Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? 8 Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'

He is saying to us that we are actual servants of God. We are all servants of God, we do what we have to do because it is our duty. That's the meaning of this parable. The modern age rejects duty because it is a feeling. Bono says,

Feelings are much stronger than thoughts. We are all led by instinct, and our intellect catches up later on.

We do Christian service when we feel like it, when we feel burn out, we don't serve anymore. A lot of us think that God is Santa Clause and He owes us a good life if you are nice. If you are naughty, he owes you a bad life. So, when you sin bad things happen to you, when you don't sin good things happen to you. So therefore, all of us expect God to be that kind of God. We have this idea, but God doesn't owe us a good life. So therefore, it is very hard being a servant of God because your life is limited by what other people think, you cannot cause offense, you also don't have to take offense, which is very difficult to do but you have to do it, you know why, because it is a duty. You don't live to please yourself. You live to please the master.

Jesus has an illustration of his teaching. He tells a story of 10 lepers

Luke 17:11-19 (ESV) On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance 13 and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." 14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; 16 and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

This story is very important. You have 10 lepers, who are the social outcast at that time. They have a debilitating disease spread by bacteria that causes damage to their nerves, the fingers all fall off and there is a sequence of events where Jesus actually heals them. Lepers were not allowed to enter the temple. They will be killed if they go into the temple. But they went and as they went, they were healed. The spiritual lesson is that strength comes through obedience. Many of us say, Oh God give us more faith. Jesus says, take your bloody hand and go and that doesn't take much faith. That takes a faith of mustard seed.

How do we apply this in our lives?

You look at this passage and you say, God I can't live in such a way that I cause no offense to my friends and friends cause no offense to me, it is too restrictive, I want to be free, I cannot live the Christian life. God is saying to you like the leper, all you need is a grain of mustard seed. All you have to do is to obey. When you obey, the faith comes, the strength comes. Don't wait for the moment that someone lays hand on you and you get power. You take whatever faith you have, even as small as a mustard seed and you go, and you believe and you go in faith. That's what happen to the leper. This is a demonstration of the spiritual principle.

Abraham was in the land of Ur and God says I want to give you a family, I want to give you a promised land, I am going to make you a nation and you have to go. Abraham never knew where he was going but he went. When he obeyed, he got the faith. Gideon first came with 30,000 troops to fight against the Midianites which have got 130,000 troops and God cut it all down to 300 and God asked him to go.

All you have to do is go and then the faith comes. It is not the other way around.

Servant is here to do the duty. Our job is not to understand everything, not to be happy but to do the right thing. We have a wrong perception in secular society. In secular society gives distorted perception of reality, this world exists for your pleasure, which is a wrong idea. The world is created to honor and glorify God. The

only way to cope with reality is that God has placed us here and wherever God has placed us we are to do our duty. Duty is important. The famous Douglas MacArthur was a very successful general and basically won every battle he actually was involved in and in his last speech to West Point Graduates he said the term six times in his speech.

Duty, honour, country, those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn

Duty is a word which we don't see in the Christian faith today. Pauline concept of discipleship is a soldier and the first thing about the soldier is duty.

How do we get the power to do this?

The power to do this come, you either do this because you owe God a debt of the law or you owe God for debt of love. The picture is the last one leper coming back.

Luke 17:15-16 (ESV) Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; 16 and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.

The power of him living was because of gratitude. He didn't do his duty out of duty, he did it because of love. John Newton was a slave trader and he marketed in African slaves and brought them to the United States and England and when he became a Christian, he went 180 degrees the other side and he became a pastor. He actually influenced William Wilberforce who actually became a member of the parliament, who actually overturned slavery after about 40 years in parliament. He wrote these words

*Our pleasure and our duty,
Though opposite before;
Since we have seen his beauty,
Are joined to part no more:
It is our highest pleasure,
No less than duty's call;
To love him beyond measure,
And serve him with our all.*

John Newton is saying, before our pleasure and our duty are two separate things, it is never pleasurable to be a soldier. It is never pleasurable to do things because we have to do them, they are opposite but because we have seen his beauty, we respond like that leper and we fall at Jesus's feet and now our duty is our highest pleasure and that's how a Christian lives with a power to live for his glory.