

Dec 25, 2012

Greetings to all those loved enormously by your Abba Father,

This is a challenge to look at the Christmas story in a little different way. How? It's not just about Jesus coming as a baby in a manger. We need to look deeper and see that behind it is a Father's loving heart who planned and sent His son to die and redeem all those who don't understand, comprehend, or receive their heavenly Father's love.



First let's look at another story told by Jesus and recorded in Luke 15:11-32 that in many translations of the bible is given a caption that is misleading, such as "The Prodigal Son" or "Parable of the Lost Son". These captions cause us to focus on one of the sons, therefore we lose sight of the primary point that I believe Jesus was making, which was about an earthly father's amazing and unconditional love for his sons.

The younger son rejects his father's faith and way of living and chooses a life style that was utterly shameful to his father. The father gives this son one-third of all that he owns, all the while knowing how he will use the money. Many days, months, possibly even years later, the son comes to his senses in a pig sty after having wasted all of his inheritance. He remembers how good it was in his father's house compared to the life in a pig sty and decides to return home, humble himself by admitting his sin, and ask his father if he could just be treated as a servant. As the son turns the last bend in the road on his way home he sees his father's house in the distance, but he also sees a figure running towards him with outstretched arms. At first he wonders, is it one of the servants, or possibly his mother, or his brother? Knowing the shame he caused, he is certain it wouldn't be his father, but suddenly he realizes it is! His father embraces his son, kisses him, orders that a robe of sonship be placed upon the young man, a ring upon his finger, new sandals for his feet, and orders that a calf be killed so they can celebrate. The father responds this way to show that he has fully forgiven the son and received him back from the dead as his son once again. What an amazing merciful kind of love this earthly father showed.



The elder son's story is different in many ways, but he was also a type of prodigal. He chose to stay home serve his father and do everything he was asked. However, what it produced in his heart was self-righteousness, anger, and bitterness from judging both his father and his younger brother for the way they have behaved. In spite of the pain caused by this elder son's actions and attitude, the father shows unconditional love and acceptance, and pleads with

this son to change his mind. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the story that indicates he ever repented or saw how wrong his own attitude and actions were.

It's the elder prodigal that I relate to the most. Although I was the youngest of three siblings, my life and behavior as a young adult was more like the older son. I was motivated primarily out of fear of my father, plus being a very shy person I didn't get into much trouble and seldom went against my father's instructions. As a teenager I did see actions in my older siblings' lives that embarrassed me. After graduating from college I was filled with pride that comes from gaining knowledge that puffs up a person (1 Cor 8:1). A year and half later the Lord called me into the ministry, and more pride and self-righteousness crept into my heart. During the next few years it was fairly common for me to embarrass my wife with my self-righteous attitude. For example, while visiting church members and people in the community we would often leave with my wife in tears because of my self-righteous behavior and know-it-all attitude. Today I'm so thankful for the patience and love of my heavenly Father who allowed the right circumstances into my life that began the process of breaking my pride and allowing me the opportunity to humble myself.

Years ago I heard someone tell a story about a church that was in need of a pastor. The pulpit committee prayed that when they got one, if God would keep him humble, they would keep him poor. They failed to understand the heart of our heavenly Father. He doesn't make or keep a person humble; however He will allow each of His children to reap the consequences of their own choices so they have sufficient opportunities to humble themselves. Humbling ourselves is an important character quality as seen in the following verses:

Phil 2:8 NAS And being found in appearance as a man, He humbléd Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Matt 18:4 NAS "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Matt 23:12 NAS "And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

James 4:10 NAS Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

1 Pet 5:6 NAS Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

2 Cor 11:7 NAS Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?

Isa 58:5a NAS "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself?..."

2 Chr 7:13-14 NAS

13 "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people,
14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

The bible has many examples of those, like the elder son, that chose not to humble themselves when the opportunity developed and therefore reaped the consequences:

Exod 10:3 Pharaoh, King of Egypt

3 And Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (NAS)

2 Chr 33:23 Amon, the 14th king of Judah who began reigning at the age of 22

23 Moreover, he did not humble himself before the LORD as his father Manasseh had done, but Amon multiplied guilt. (NAS)

2 Chr 36:12 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king of Judah

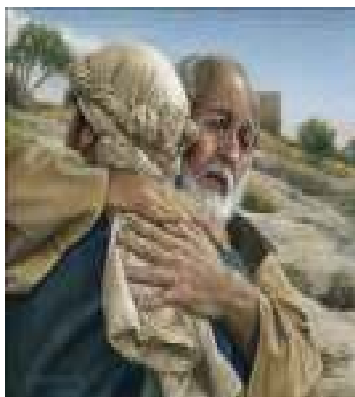
12 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD. (NAS)

Dan 5:22 Belshazzar, king of Babylon

22 "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this," (NAS)

What does it mean to humble yourself? This is a subject much too broad to discuss fully at this time, so I will focus only on what can be seen in the story of the two sons. The younger son demonstrated some aspects of humility after he finally "...came to his senses" (Luke 15:17) or began to think right for the first time in a long while. He then remembers how good it had been living in his father's house compared to the famine he was currently experiencing. Next, he admits to himself what he had done wrong and decides to go back to his father, admit how he'd sinned against both him and God. He seeks reconciliation, and to be restored to the family as a lowly servant.

The older brother demonstrates what humility is not, or to express it another way, he shows what pride and arrogance is. He thinks only of himself, and sees himself as the only one doing the right thing. He also focuses on what he sees as the mistakes of those around him. He sets himself up as judge of his younger brother and father. Pride always sees what you have done right and what others have done wrong. Pride is never willing to forgive and let go, but holds on to its anger and hatred rather than seeking full reconciliation with those that have been hurt or wounded.



Jesus' Key Point

The key point that Jesus was making is not about either of the two sons or humility, but about an earthly father that after all of the hurt, pain, shame, and humiliation he'd suffered because of the choices, actions, and attitudes of his sons continued to love them both immensely and unconditionally. Jesus was painting a portrait for those he was speaking to that day, and for us today, of what his heavenly Father is like. So maybe the story should be captioned "The Loving Father of All Prodigals".

Application

Have we done the same thing with the story of the birth of Jesus by focusing only on Jesus rather than seeing what our heavenly Father did? Certainly it's right for us to focus on and celebrate Jesus coming to dwell in a human body. But by focusing only on that, do we fail to see and remember what Abba Father did? Behind the whole story there was God the Father who only had one son that dwelt in His bosom, one whom He loved more than man can ever comprehend. Yet the Father saw all the prodigals that had refused the life He wanted them to have and who, in their rebellion, were living life with the consequences of their choices. The heavenly Father knew before the foundation of the world was laid, the choices that mankind would make. So He sent His son as a human being, watched him mature into a young man whom He was extremely well pleased with, then watched in agony as He permitted both kinds of prodigals to beat and crucify his son as if he was a common criminal. Finally, in the greatest act of love mankind has ever seen, the Heavenly Father turned and walked away from His son, leaving him alone on the cross as he bore the sins of all of us prodigals.

We could sum up Jesus' life in a circular pattern:

He dwelt in the bosom of the Heavenly Father.

He dwelt in the womb of a virgin.

He dwelt in a manger in Bethlehem.

He dwelt as an adult without a place to lay his head.

He humbled himself and dwelt upon a cross.

He dwells in the hearts of redeemed prodigals.

He dwelt once again in the bosom of the Heavenly Father.

You see, the Christmas story is about our Abba Father's love for not only His only begotten son, the Lord Jesus Christ, but for all those that have chosen a way of life that brings shame, hurt and pain to our heavenly Father. That means me and you! Let us not forget to thank our Heavenly Father for the wisdom of His plan to redeem mankind and the sacrificial love it took for Him to send His son.

A Blessing for the New Year

We bless you and your family with the following during 2013:

Being troubled like Mary was at the marvelous things your Father is going to do in your life.

Grace like Joseph had to resolve inner conflicts when life's events and relationships don't make sense.

Time to ponder, like Mary did, what your heavenly Father's words mean for Jesus to live in you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Peace and rest that Jesus experienced in the manger.

Direction and guidance through dreams, visions, angelic visitations, and the decisions of government leaders like Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men experienced.

Great joy at the news your heavenly Father will bring to you.

Receiving and walking in the favor of your Heavenly Father like Mary did.

Experiencing the love of your Abba Father in a new and dynamic way.

In the Father's service,

Jim & Susan McCorkle

Repairing The Breach Ministry

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