

I. My Notes ... WWC message 8/2

II. Series: When Justice Meets Love

- Title: Restoration
- Text: Luke 15:11-32
- Quote: Justice is for those who deserve it; mercy is for those who don't.
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III. Introduction

- In one way or another we have experienced injustice and mercy at various points throughout our lives. Being treated unjustly leads to hurt, despair, and a sense of worthlessness. Being touched by mercy and grace is transformative, in many ways it is empowering. To know that you are valued, that love is always there, and that support is unwavering brings hope and motivation to even the most difficult circumstances. We live in a world that demands accountability, which is quick to assign blame. And because of that, many try to shift the focus elsewhere. It's not my fault is a common theme in one way or another. When responding to the question, "who did this" or "how did it happen" my kids would often say, "it's not me." I would tell them that I needed to find "Not Me" and deal with them. The desire to avoid consequences is strong and most often driven by fear. It often leads to choices and decisions that create added stress and difficulty in relationships.
- Let me be clear, justice matters. It ensures that dignity and respect are driving forces in the way we treat, that we relate to others. Justice matters to God. There are more than 2000 Scriptures that point to justice – it is an important topic. **Jeremiah 9:23-24 CSB** tells us, "23 *“This is what the Lord says: The wise person should not boast in his wisdom; the strong should not boast in his strength; the wealthy should not boast in his wealth. 24 But the one who boasts should boast in this: that he understands and knows me—that I am the Lord, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things. This is the Lord’s declaration.”* God’s Kingdom is defined by justice, and it is something that we, as those who believe and trust in Him, should pursue.

- What happens when justice and love come face to face? When compassion and understanding deal with the circumstance, not punishment? Let's look at a well-known story in Scripture that makes this point.

IV. Demands

- I know that there have been times that I have made quick and selfish choices. It has always led to some kind of consequence and often given me a life lesson. The parable that many recognize as "The Prodigal Son" is a good example of this.
- **Luke 15:11-13 CSB**
11 He also said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living.
- Jesus is surrounded by sinners, by those looking for hope, for understanding, for those in desperate need of grace. He is teaching them by stories (parables) they could relate to. While this was happening the Pharisees and Scribes were criticizing and complaining about who Jesus was associating with.
- In this chapter of Luke there are 3 parables that Jesus tells which point to the grace and kindness of the Lord God. This parable relates the story of a self-centered young man who demands what he feels he deserves. He has everything, a loving home – comfort – a future, and it isn't enough to satisfy him.
- By demanding his inheritance, the son was essentially divorcing himself from the family. No more relationships, no more accountability, no more familial connection. He was going to live life on his terms, his way. (I don't know if this sounds familiar to anyone). The father chose to give him what he asked for. There could have been lectures about responsibility, there could have been pressure about maintaining family bonds, there could have been condemnation and criticism, but the father granted the son's request. I wonder if he had an idea of what would likely take place.
- As often happens, "my way" leads to a place of trouble and consequence.

V. Life Happens

- **Luke 15:14 CSB**

14 After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing.

- The famine wasn't caused by the son's reckless behavior; it only exposed his vulnerabilities. As often happens, impulsive actions, poor planning, lead to less-than-ideal ways to respond.
- It's the same way today, many are faced with similar circumstances - financial ruin from poor planning, emotional emptiness from chasing temporary highs, or spiritual drought from neglecting deeper truths.
- The choice is ours and this is a good reminder that freedom (getting what we want) without wisdom can lead to famine.

- **Luke 15:15-16 CSB**

15 Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything.

- The survival instinct is strong in most of us. This boy came face to face with desperate circumstances. It brought him to a point that he wouldn't even consider while in his father's house – he had to go to work. He sought a way to deal with his situation that most would not even consider, taking a job feeding pigs.
- This young man, in his choice, had come to the end of his rope. Here's the truth, hard times may touch our lives and there are circumstances that are hard to deal with on our own. We weren't made to go this alone. And asking for help goes against the idea of self-sufficiency and my way is the right way. Add to that the fear of being rejected and it is a recipe for disaster.

VI. I Have a Need

- Recognizing you have a need is the beginning of healing and hope. Jesus told the Disciples, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs."* (**Matthew 5:3 CSB**). What does it mean to be "poor in spirit?" It is

recognizing that you have a need that you are unable to meet on your own. This understanding leads to seeking help and finding salvation.

- **Luke 15:17-19 CSB**

17 When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. 19 I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers." '

- I'd like to say that this young man recognized the error of his ways. It was hunger that drove him to a place to remember how well the servants in his father's house were treated. Anything had to be better than what he was currently facing. Pain and discomfort have a way of pushing one to a place of change.
- External trials have a purpose, even when it is hard to see. One thing they do is reveal those areas in us that need work – in other words, these difficulties reveal internal deficits.
- Has there been a time in your life that tough times – an unexpected illness, job loss, some type of relational breakdown – has come and the pain of the circumstance has led to a positive perspective?
- This repentance that the young man offered came from seeing his father in a new light. He wasn't the rule enforcing authority figure that was left behind by the young man's selfish desires. There is a change in his thinking ... My father is kind and treats his servants well. If he is willing to forgive me, perhaps I can become a servant (having already abandoned the family).
- Justice says, "you made the choice. Now, bear the guilt and burden of your mistake."
- Love might say something different.

VII. Forgiveness Can Be Found

- **Luke 15:20-24 CSB**

20 So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms

around his neck, and kissed him. 21 The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'
22 "But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.

- There is a lot here to think about. Especially, understanding the context in which this parable was told. Before telling this parable, Jesus had told 2 other parables. This was bothering the Pharisees and Scribes who were monitoring Jesus' words to try to catch Him in a lie. Jesus asked the question of the crowd (including the religious elite standing around them), *"If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?"* (Luke 15:4 NLT). Now, Jesus is telling a parable about a lost sheep that returns home.
- There is joy, there is celebration. The father sees the son coming home and runs to meet/greet him. Older men in this culture, during this time didn't run. It wasn't considered dignified. The father ran, embraced his son, and even as the son tried to ask for forgiveness – it had already been given. A celebration was being ordered.
- This should be a comfort to every person seeking forgiveness, wanting to repent for their mistakes and misdeeds. Forgiveness will always be found; you will always be welcomed with open arms and a kiss.
- Notice the love, the compassion, the rejoicing. There wasn't a lecture on poor choices or foolish living. There wasn't a time of "think about what you have done" ... there was love. Love and justice meet, and love embraces the folly.

VIII. Another Part of the Story

- There is another son. On the surface he appears to be the "good son" ... a compliant child who is helping his father.
- **Luke 15:25-27 CSB**

25 “Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. 27 ‘Your brother is here,’ he told him, ‘and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

- The older son didn’t know what had occurred, he heard the commotion. Instead of going in and finding out for himself, he sought a worker to tell him. Looking at this for a moment, pride kept him from going to his father. And this got in the way of celebrating the return of his brother.

- **Luke 15:28-30 CSB**

28 “Then he became angry and didn’t want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’

- On the outside he appeared good and obedient, devoted to his family. On the inside (in his heart) it was about him being better, being right. There wasn’t any room for love – for his brother or for his father. It was about his adherence to his way. He violated the greatest commandment – loving God and loving others (Luke 10:26-28). This is where his anger came from. He couldn’t see the father’s joy that his son had come home, he couldn’t see that his brother was back. The older son could only see the sins, the shortcomings, the faults his brother had. The older brother “knew” he was better. He was divorcing himself from the family by his attitude – “this son of yours.”
- The religious elite of the day saw justice as transactional – obedience earns a reward, disobedience gets punished. This was the attitude of the older son. Do you think that the Scribes and Pharisees were uncomfortable or offended by this story? How about you? Does it bother your sense of justice and fairness?
- Let me just say at this point, I am incredibly grateful that God is in the business of restoration not retaliation.

- **Romans 5:6-10 NLT**

6 When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person,

though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. 9 And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. 10 For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.

IX. The Grace Response

- The father embracing the younger son is a wonderful example of the grace and mercy we find from our Lord. Look at the grace and truth he speaks to his older son.
- **Luke 15:31-32 CSB**
31 “ ‘Son,’ he said to him, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”
- Even in his anger and rebellion the father still refers to the older boy as “son” – a term of endearment and affection. Even in pride and selfishness our Lord is still offering His love to us. The older boy in this parable couldn’t see it, many of the religious elite couldn’t accept it, and people today struggle to believe it. The truth that you can rest in, the heart that you can trust, is Jesus. Look at the reaction of the father in this parable – he risked his reputation. There could be criticism for accepting and embracing his son; he behaved undignified – his joy and love were so great that he hiked up his robe and ran to embrace his son. Just a quick question, can you see the Lord doing this for you?

X. Last Words

- So here we are—standing at the threshold of the celebration, with the music echoing from the Father’s house. One son came home in repentance. The other stands outside in resentment. And the Father? He’s not inside enjoying the feast. He’s outside, pleading with the one who still doesn’t understand the heart of grace.
This parable doesn’t end with resolution. It ends with an invitation.

- Will we define justice by what we think we deserve, or by what God delights to restore? Will we let love offend our sense of fairness, or will we let it reshape our understanding of mercy?

The Father's justice is not blind—it sees the brokenness in both sons. But His love is not passive—it moves toward each one with open arms. That's the kind of justice that heals. That's the kind of love that restores.

- So, whether you've wandered far or stood close but bitter, the invitation is the same: Come in. Come home. The feast is for you.

Let's not miss the celebration because we're clinging to comparison. Let's not reject restoration because it didn't follow our rules. Let's step into the kind of justice that rejoices when the lost are found, and the dead are raised to life.

- Because when justice meets love in the Father's house, grace throws a party—and everyone is invited.
- Let's Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always