A Father's Love is Unconditional

Luke 15:11-32; Eph. 2:8

God's gift of Jesus is not about obligation, expectation, or even a subtle want; it's about love. It's the love of a Creator who knows that apart from Him, we're incomplete, lost, and broken.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, this became apparent when the son left and went into the far country. It is significant and should not be lost that the place where the son traveled was called "the far country." It was a country, a land, a place, that was far from the Father. A place of spiritual separation. A place where love is conditional. Apart from the Father the son was incomplete, he had no place, no standing. Apart from the Father the son did not understand his worth. Apart from the Father, there was no sense of belonging with purpose. The son was lost.

What is clear to me is the Father did not need anything from the son. The Father was whole and complete within himself. The love he gave was not dependent on the son's actions, it was unconditional. There is an unwritten question within the parable that is seldom if ever raised. How did the son know he could return home?

Indulge me as I tell the story of the son's departure. The son had been thinking about going out on his own for some time. Leaving home is not something you normally do at the moment. He probably had been discussing it with his older brother and finally found the courage to speak to his father. He says, Father, I want what is due to me as part of my inheritance. His father explains that this is not his inheritance it belongs first to his brother. The youngest son retorts, what about mine? What do I get? What is my place in this family? The father loves his son and relents, giving him his portion. As the son leaves, the father says to him. "You realize this is always home. You can come here when you can't go anywhere else." The son does not understand it is only in his father's presence that he is whole. It is only in his father's presence that he is somebody. It is only in his father's presence that he feels and knows unconditional love. It is only a father who loves unconditionally that would give what he earned to his son with no strings attached.

When the son goes into the far country things begin to fall apart. The further he gets from his father the worse things become. He becomes ensnared in the culture of the far country. A culture that dismantles souls and destroys spirits. He becomes such a reprobate that he

finds himself tending to swine and eating the food of swine. The turning point of the parable is when “he comes to himself.” He comes to himself. Who is this self? How did he arrive at this place?

The self that he becomes is the self that he remembers. The self that his father told him he was. The young man remembered the words of his father. He remembered the lessons of his father. He remembered that he was loved and valued.

These are lessons that came flooding back into his memory. But most of all he remembered the invitation. He remembered his father saying, “this is always home, you can come back here when you can’t go anywhere else.” He felt the love of his father reach across all of his arrogance and hostility and heal his broken spirit. Here is a young man broken, lost, and confused. He is afraid because the culture he has lived in has vanquished any love he may have understood. The only kind of love he understands now is the kind of love that uses people and takes advantage of people. Love that looks for what’s in it for themselves kind of love. He had forgotten the kind of love that gives without expectation. The kind of love that gives you everything you ask for and let’s you squander it. He remembered the kind of love that when you return home again asks no questions, makes no judgments, has no opinions. He came to himself. He remembered he had a father who loved him unconditionally. When he returned home he embraced his father’s invitation. He was treated as royalty, the lost son, returning home.

Reconciliation is only possible if we give without expectation. Reconciliation is only possible if unconditional love crosses the divide that separates us from God and each other. God doesn’t wait for us to fix ourselves. Divine hope is not passive, it is active and relentless and is willing to become a casualty for you. Divine hope becomes vulnerable so you can be made whole again and be restored. Divine hope takes you back, no questions asked, no judgments made. Divine hope realizes the consequences of your actions were all the lessons you needed to bring you back home. Divine hope restores, divine hope reconciles, divine hope makes a way when there is no way at all.

Blessings,

Pastor Gool