

Message Summary

The Christ Fellowship Miniseries “The Story of 3 Sons” focuses on the protagonists’ hearts: the Father’s loving and welcoming heart and the sons’ distant and cold hearts. The Father’s and sons’ well known external actions are only indications of these inward hearts (cf. Mt. 7:15-20).

The story begins with a father (representing God) and his two beloved sons (representing sinners). This father is a good father, engaged in the life of his family and wanting his sons’ hearts. His father surely warned these sons about “*the fleeting pleasures of sin*” (Heb. 11:25) that will ultimately make us miserable and stupid. Despite such steadfast love, however, the younger son’s heart cared only for himself and the sin he loved. Rather than wanting his father, this younger son wanted his father’s things. The younger son gave voice to this desire in his request to receive the inheritance early (v. 12). Essentially, he told his father that he wished he were dead, so that he could enjoy his own life, his own way, at his own place. This wise father, who was faithfully storing up an inheritance for his children (Prv. 13:22), liquidated this inheritance for his son. The son squandered it in reckless living (v. 13). This son was trying to get away from God. But God cannot be fooled or escaped (cf. Ps. 139:7-12; Jonah 1)! Sin cast the younger son into a downward spiral of stupidity, shame, misery, and loneliness. The sin of self-worship cost everything. The younger son had nothing left but the energy to feed the unclean pigs pods that he longed to eat (v. 15). No one was there to help him, because his “friends” used him for money just like he had used his father.

His father’s love gave him sanity. His father’s servants were well fed and well cared for. The son rightly recognizes that he doesn’t deserve to be a son, and returns only to be a servant in his father’s household. But his father awaited him. While the son “*was still a long way off*” (v. 20), his father ran after him to greet him. The father took his son’s shame himself, and gave his own honor to his son. This parable’s Storyteller was God Himself, who came to earth in the Person of the Son. Jesus wrote the script, and plays the leading role, in taking our shame on the cross to give us life and resurrection to be honored as sons before the Father.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Martin Luther taught that the problem with sin is being so “curved in on ourselves” we fail to love God and our neighbor. How does this sin of self-worship cost us everything? Why are love for God and our neighbor the two greatest commandments (Mt. 22:34-40)?

In what ways in the parable is the younger son stupefied by his selfish sin (see vv. 12-15)? How does sin put us in a downward spiral of stupidity? Consider the examples of Pharaoh’s hard heart (Ex. 5-12) and Paul’s analysis of the world (Rm. 1:18-32). Are there times in your own life where sin has made you stupid?

How was the father holy and compassionate, righteous and merciful, upright and gracious, all at the same time? Why are grace and holiness often seen as antithetical to one another? How can we cultivate more of both?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don’t have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Do you want God, or, like the younger son, just the things He has made?
2. Are you prone to think you have gone so far from God that you are beyond the reach of His grace?
3. Are you living for yourself? Are you experiencing some of the shame, misery, or loneliness that the fleeting pleasures of sin ultimately bring?
4. Are you looking to other people to give you what you truly need?
5. Do you recognize your need for God? Have you turned from sin and self to come home to Him as Father?
6. Does your heart, like God's, delight in showing compassion to people?
7. Are you loving people around you or just using them? Who are specific people you can love better this week?
8. Who can you bless this week with lavish and abundant gifts?
9. Are you finding your happiness, holiness, and true love in God alone, or is your delight in God polluted by love of worldly things?
10. "When the lost and rebellious son came home the father was waiting for him with _____ in his heart." When relating to lost and rebellious people, how is your heart typically tempted to fill the blank (e.g., anger, bitterness, unforgiveness)? Do you look down on others and see yourself as superior? How does God fill the blank?
11. Fathers, are you just providing financially for your children, or is your heart engaged in loving and spending time with your children? At home, are you a "zombie" or a loving father?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for taking our shame and giving us his honor through Christ.
 - Pray that the Lord would fill CFC with many loving fathers who engage and spend time with their families to the glory of God.
 - Pray that the Lord would use the new Christ Fellowship College class (*How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*) to equip many to know and proclaim the heart of this loving Father.
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that our church would be a place that welcomes lost and rebellious sinners, and pray that many lost and rebellious sinners would come through our doors.
 - Pray for God's blessing on VBS ("God Always Wins," June 5-9), that God would provide the needed resources and volunteers, and use the ministry to teach many kids in our community Christ's victory over sin and death in the gospel.
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray for the Dream Center VBS and Cookout (June 11), that God would bring many families, the heart of our loving Father would be clearly explained, and that many sinners would come to the Father who waits to embrace them.
 - Pray for Jeff and Misti Fairchild as they transition to Honduras. Pray that the Lord would bless their transitions from Gadsden, training and language acquisition in Mexico, and ministry to reach many with the gospel in Honduras.