

## Knowing and Being Known

***Why did the prodigal son return home to dad? How/why did he know to return home to dad?*** The answer to these questions seems simple enough. He saw how his father had treated everyone while growing up. *“Even the hired servants have more than enough bread.”* He knew his dad. This is how he knew to go home. This is why he went home. But here’s the thing: ***He really didn’t know his dad, did he?*** It’s clear from his own words that he only saw his relationship to dad as a business kind of relationship. Based on his own words, his whole notion of “repentance” consisted of working out a *quid pro quo* kind of business deal with dad. He messed up and he was sorry, but he was willing to work off his debt and earn his way back into dad’s good graces. Dad could hire him on as a servant, and after a while he would work off that debt and ***earn*** his way back into sonship.

***But...that’s not how dad worked, was it?*** Dad never stopped loving his wayward idiot of a son. He never stopped watching for his son to return. And when that idiot finally appeared on the horizon—years later—dad did the unthinkable: he abandoned all ***dignity and propriety***, hiked up his robe and ran out to embrace the idiot and welcome him home (this kind of behavior was absolutely unheard of in Jesus’ time; even scandalous); no conditions, no “I told you so’s,” ***just unconditional fatherly love***. And even then the son ***still*** doesn’t get it. Dad is trying to hug him and kiss him and welcome him home, and this idiot launches into his ***rehearsed*** proposal. *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”* But before he could pitch his business deal about getting hired on as a servant and earning his way back, the father cuts him off and tells the servants to fetch the finest robe and ring and shoes and put them on his once-dead-but-now-alive son. *“Kill the fatted calf! It’s feast time! My son is home!”* ***The son really didn’t know the father, did he?***

The same can be said for the older brother, who threw a royal temper tantrum when he discovered that dad was throwing a feast for his idiot brother. This guy, who claimed to be the “good” son, was shocked—***even offended***—to find out that his father was so merciful and gracious. *“I’ve done all this over all these years, and you never did a thing for me; not even a small goat so I could party with my friends. But this idiot son of yours finally decides to trudge home after making a mess of his life and wasting all your hard-earned money on prostitutes and loose living, and you kill the fatted calf! It’s not fair! It’s not right!”* This guy’s own words confess the fact that he didn’t know his father either.

This is why Jesus spoke this parable to the grumbling scribes and Pharisees. They couldn’t understand (or stand) the fact that mercy and grace could ***possibly*** be

shown to someone who wasn't near as good as they were, especially to a sinful reprobate like a tax collector or a prostitute. Where were all the necessary good works? *"What about us? We've kept the Law perfectly, and we don't even get an 'atta-boy.' We get nothing. To top it all off you want us to celebrate with these nasty deplorables?! Never! My god would never behave in such a way, and he would never even think to ask me to behave in such a way!"* They really didn't know their heavenly Father, did they?

What about you? How well do you know your heavenly Father? Unlike these two proverbial brothers, we do know that our Father is gracious and merciful. We know that He shows us mercy, not giving us what we do deserve, and that He also bestows upon us His grace, giving us what we don't deserve; ***what we could never merit or earn.*** We know that all of this overflowing mercy and grace and love is ours solely because of the all-redeeming work and person of the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. We don't earn any of it. It's a free and unmerited gift because of Christ.

Here's the thing: ***HOW*** do you know all this? Is it because you can see it? The prodigal knew what he thought to be true about dad (which wasn't correct) based on what he saw. Look around at the world we live in. What do our eyes tell us? It's easy to draw all kinds of wrong conclusions about our Father based solely upon what our sinful eyes see. There is a whole lot of wickedness and suffering going on in our day and age. The wicked seem to prosper while the good get chewed up and spit out. ***Does God not care? Why is God so unfair?!***

What about our natural default setting for "karma"? You know what I mean... people who do good deeds will get rewarded with good things, while people who do bad things will get punished. This is where hearing also comes into play. Two big concerns here, though: ***A) What are you hearing? and B) Where are you hearing it from?*** The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh all tell us that we can and should try to win God over with our works and our deeds. We are hearing from all over, and even from within our own sinful hearts, that we should, just like the prodigal son, try to strike a deal with God. Sadly, this deal-striking quite often isn't even focused on regaining God's righteousness and favor (which is impossible). If we're honest, it's often focused selfishly on ***regaining prosperity lost.*** Life hits the skids and we turn to God and try to strike a deal so that we can attempt to regain and recapture what we lost; what we feel entitled to. *"God, tell you what I'm gonna do. If you do this for me, I'll do this for you."* Sound familiar? It should, because we're all guilty of it from time to time.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: How do you know all this blessed Truth about your heavenly Father and His undeserved mercy and grace and love for you? ***You know it ONLY because He Himself has told you.*** You hear Him and His Word, and through the working of the Holy Spirit in that Word, your ears

and your eyes are opened to hear and to see these blessed realities. It's only through the eyes of faith that we can look to this cross and see the Father's prodigal love. (To be prodigal isn't a bad thing. The word actually means "to be lavish, recklessly extravagant, to spare no costs, to withhold nothing.") ***Your God and Father withheld nothing for you. He spared no costs.*** He gave His only-begotten Son to die for you. This true and only "good Son" was the complete payment for all our sins, and Jesus willingly laid down His good life in exchange for ours purely out of a prodigal love that we will never be able to fully comprehend or understand.

Because of this all-redeeming, prodigal love we have **more** than the Father's mercy; we have His grace. Remember: mercy is not getting what you deserve, whereas grace is getting what you don't deserve. God doesn't strike us down for our sin. That's mercy. More than that, He restores us to the royal household. That's grace. We've done **nothing** to deserve this restoration, nor could we, and yet He does it. He comes to us to take us up in His arms. God didn't wait for us to bring Him terms for restoration that we could both work with. He didn't wait for us to return home to heaven so that we could work out a deal with Him for mercy and grace. ***That would be impossible!*** Our deadly sinful condition prevents us from **ever** setting foot in the heavenly household of eternal life.

But this is precisely why God comes down to us. He comes to us where we're at. He takes on our flesh. More than that, He takes that flesh to the cross in order to save us and redeem us; to restore us and make us His own. He pours out His ***rich and undeserved*** gifts of mercy and grace upon us. Look no further than the font. Here He ***lavishly*** pours out His baptism upon us, clothing us with the royal robe of Christ's righteousness. We are His holy children, graciously, lavishly, prodigally restored to Him and His royal household. Look to this altar. Look to this rail. The never-ending and all-sufficient feast of victory, slaughtered once for all, continues to be set before us. He graciously bids us to eat and drink of this feast of life everlasting, not because we've earned it, but because He loves us.

You know, when you see all these things through the eyes of saving faith; by the working of the Holy Spirit in these, His means of grace, when you come to yourself and come before God; ***when you see things for how they truly are***, you almost have to agree with the proverbial elder brother here. **It's not fair. It's not fair at all.** Thank God that He's not fair. Thank God that instead ***His love, His grace, and His mercy for us is prodigally unconditional, unwavering, and eternal.***

In the name of our truly prodigal Savior...

**AMEN**