

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 3 April 2022

Sermon Title : Our Father Who Art in Heaven

Speaker : Rev Reuben Ng

Text : Luke 15:11-24

INTRODUCTION

“Our Father Who Art in Heaven” is the first line of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray. From this prayer that we pray every Sunday, we learn that God is our Father. But what kind of father image do we have of our God, our ‘Father in heaven’?

The understanding of our ‘Father in heaven’ is very much influenced by:

- the experience we have with our father on earth. There will be situations when an earthly father’s action, behaviour and speech, will leave a mark in their children’s lives in a bad way, resulting in them thinking, “Since my father on earth is like this, our ‘Father in heaven’ should be similar.”
- the understanding in the world of what a God should be like. Some people would view God or the gods as being distant, detached, cold, and uncaring; only concerned about how their will is being played out on earth without caring about what humans think.

Parable of the Prodigal Son/Prodigal Father

Luke 15:11-24 is often known as the “Parable of the Prodigal Son”. Prodigal means to be wastefully extravagant so some scholars suggest that the title should be “Parable of the Prodigal Father” in view of the wasteful extravagance that the Father exhibits for the lost son who returned.

Luke 15:11-12 - The younger son requested for his share of the father’s estate.

- Inheritance is typically given after a father’s demise. Asking his father for his share of inheritance while the father was still alive is rejecting the father-son relationship, treating the father as dead or cursing him to die.
- The younger one is not doing anything wrong in the eyes of the law on inheritance in Deuteronomy but asking for it while his father was alive was against the culture.

From other Ancient Near East literature of the same period, it is noted that this type of request by a son happened only twice, and both ended in death. In one example, the father was so shocked that he literally dropped dead while in the other case, the father was so angry that he beat his son to death. Hence, it seemed that the best-case scenario for this parable would be that the father in the parable would feel

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angry, lament about his worthless and ingrate son whom the father had raised, and disown the son, resulting in the son getting no inheritance but with no death involved.

Image of our Father in heaven

The father agreed to the son's request, took all the trouble and inconvenience to divide his wealth of livestock, land and other possessions and gave his son the portion of his inheritance. The father did that even after experiencing the rejection and rudeness his son had shown in being unwilling to wait for him to die before getting his inheritance.

Luke 15:13 - Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in loose living.

- "Not long after" shows the urgency of the son to get out of the house, away from his family. He gathered all his wealth, not leaving some behind, to go to a distant country with no intention of returning. This is rejection of the utmost.
- At the distant country, he squandered his estate on loose living, feasting and enjoying himself and spending on wrong and sinful desires such as prostitutes.

Luke 15:14-15 - Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he became impoverished. So, he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him into his fields to feed swine.

- After he had spent everything, severe famine then set in that country. Although foolish spending was within his control, famine was not. If he had been wiser, spending on helping people, he could have received help and resources from those he had helped. He went from feasting to being impoverished.
- He had to hire himself out to a citizen of that country. 'Hired himself out' here meant that although he was a Jew, he had to bind and cleave to the culture and belief system of that country. This was how far away he was physically and culturally. He even undertook the task of feeding swine when swine is considered unclean to the Jews.

Many would have thought this would be a good place for Jesus' story to end with moral lessons that one can take away – The son was rude, made bad decisions which resulted in bad situations and had to live out the bad consequences. Moral justice has been meted out - bad guys deserves bad consequences. However, Jesus' story continued.....

Luke 15:17-19 - The younger son came to his senses and realised that his father's hired men were living better than him. He decided to return home and thought through how to convince his father to accept him, even if it was only as his hired man.

- "Came to his senses" refers to someone who had been in a deep state of unconsciousness or insanity regaining consciousness and sanity. What could

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have caused the younger son to come to his senses? It could be hunger pangs or the bad situation that he was experiencing.

- A resolution is only meaningful when carried out, or else it remains only as a good intention. The younger son set out to return home from the distant country. He was penniless, filthy, smelly, weary, uncomfortable, embarrassed but he followed through his resolution. Without perseverance and being resolute, he would not have reached home. Was it true repentance? There must be some sense of repentance besides hunger pangs, or he would have given up on that long trip home.

Luke 15:20-24 - While the younger son was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Image of our Father in heaven

It is no coincidence that the father saw the son when he was still a long way off. Instead of asking the son what he had done with his wealth to land himself in such a bad situation and scolding him for the consequences he deserved:

- **The father has been watching out for the son's return.**
- **He felt compassion and pulled his robe up to run towards his son, disregarding his high standing and dignity, embracing and kissing his filthy son repeatedly.**
- **Although the son started his prepared speech, the father did not allow him to complete his speech but asked his slave to bring out the best robe to be put on his son's filthy body.**
- **The father also put a ring on his son to signify that the son is now part of this household and has the authority as a son.**
- **In those days, only free people wore sandals while slaves only carried them. The father restored the younger son to full rights of a son.**
- **A fattened calf is slaughtered for special occasions during celebrations, typically planned and scheduled occasions. The father was so happy that his "dead son" had come to life again, was lost but now found that he slaughtered the fattened calf to celebrate this unplanned occasion.**

A story about God's affection for humanity

- a. Rejection: We reject God, but God responds with compassion.
- b. Compassion: Compassion causes God to run and embrace and kiss us.
- c. Restoration: God restores us to the authority and rights as His children.
- d. Celebration: God rejoices at us being found and returning to His house.

CONCLUSION

Our Father in heaven is like the prodigal father wastefully extravagant in His love and compassion lavished on us, His children. Let us be grateful for God's stubborn love that will not let us go and return to Him for He is watching out for our return.

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A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

1.
 - a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
 - b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Appoint someone to read Luke 15:11-24 slowly.
 - a. As God's word was read, what is the image you have of our 'Father in heaven'? Describe and share with your group.
 - b. Our 'Father in heaven' is like the prodigal father who is wastefully extravagant in His love and compassion lavished on us. How will you respond to this revelation?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

3. Rejection, compassion, restoration, celebration are the phases showing God's affection for humanity.
 - a. In which of these phases have you experienced the affection of our 'Father in heaven'?
 - b. How does your experience in 3a above affect your relationship with God?

4. Is there an area in your life that you feel unworthy of God's lavish love of restoration or celebration for you?
 - a. What is one thing you can do to accept God's restoration and celebration?
 - b. How can your group members help or encourage you to achieve 4a above, for the following week(s) till your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies and Prayer

Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.

5. Share your personal testimony of how you have experienced the stubborn love of our 'Father in heaven' that refused to let you go even when you have distanced yourself from Him.

OR

Give thanks to God for always watching out for our return.

6. With a prayer partner, take time to pray for the concerns in 4a and 4b above. Seek the Holy Spirit's empowerment to fulfil what you have committed to do for yourself and one another by surrendering to God all your fears and concerns.

As a group, pray also for the Holy Spirit to convict our church of areas we have strayed from God and be affirmed of His lavish love so we may take that bold step of returning to Him.

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