

Fourth Sunday in Lent

UNEQUAL PREQUELS

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

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Analysis by Marcus Felde

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3So he told them this parable: 11b"There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' 20So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to

be called your son.’ 22But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Author’s Note: The Word of the Lord. Now, pick your prequel. Which brother’s line of thinking represents your account of who you are now, because of where you have been and what you have done? Are you with the Olderson or the Youngerson? Which sounds more like you: “Look here, I’ve been good,” or “Father, I have not been good”?

**THE WORK OF GOD’S LAW UPON THE SINNER
ANALYSIS (CONDEMNATION)**

OLDERSON'S ANALYSIS: "Look here! For all these years I . . ."

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *The Iniquity of Inequity*

"Justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done" (Gordon Hewart, in *Rex v. Sussex Justices ex parte McCarthy*). What a travesty, how disgraceful, for the "bad brother" to be seen to be treated so well. Big brother has been short-sheeted (short-sheeped?) once again. His whine bids fair to become a full-fledged prequel which will account for his fate as having to do with what he has done/suffered.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Crying out to the God of Fairness*

"Listen!" the older brother says. (Literally, "Look!") (Contrast the younger brother's "Father," but more on that later.) He wants a hearing. He wants to be deposed, a lawyer would say. Look at my case, and give me what is fair. I have always blah blah; whereas *he* has always blah blah blah; and now look! God, I'm talking to *you*. (I think.) Anybody home? How's come I'm not getting anywhere with you? Don't you care about what is right—like I do?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Out, Cold. Out Cold.*

He made his bet, and now he is going to lie in it. He bet if he was good, he would get his due. This is his backstory, and he is going to stick with it. Even if he does not get to take part in the banquet. Is this not hell? "He became angry and refused to go in" (15:28). Stayed angry. Stayed out.

**THE WORK OF GOD'S GOSPEL UPON THE SINNER
ANASTASIS (RESURRECTION)**

YOUNGERSON'S ANASTASIS (Gk., resurrection): "Father, I . . ."

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Let Us Eat and Celebrate*

The resurrection of the "dead" brother (15:32) begins with a warm welcome. He who is truly not worthy (he admitted it himself) to be the Father's son—is. Even before he works off what he owes. Even without the older son being consulted. This will become the younger one's story (prequel) and song: "I once was dead, but now I live."

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Crying, to the God of "enough and to spare"*

Youngerson's appeal is not made to the God of fairness, but to the God of mercy. Finally recognizing the true character of his Father's mercy ("How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare"), he repents of his misplaced faith in the disappointing god of Suityourself, and walks home. When he gets a chance to address their father, he calls him "Father," and, when he starts his "I" speech, what follows is not a boast but repentance.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Which One's Cup Runneth Over?*

It still doesn't seem fair that it should work out this way: bad boy does good. But it wasn't about him/them in the first place, it was always going to be about the goodness of God, not the goodness of people. When it is about the goodness of God, then indeed does the cup run over. Not only will there be bread enough and to spare, there will also be brothers and sisters and wine and joy.