† Blessed is our God always, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. ... in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Through the prayers of our holy Fathers and Mothers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen. Glory to You, our God, glory to You.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, You are everywhere and fill all things, Treasury of blessings, and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

† Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us (three times).

† Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Luke 15:11-32

A certain man had two sons: The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me my share of the inheritance.” So, [the Father] divided the shares between [the two brothers].

Not many days later, the younger son packed everything together, leaving on his journey to a distant land, and there wasted his property on riotous living. When he had spent his last cent, a massive famine battered everything in that land; and he began to feel his poverty. Then [in desperation] he allied[[1]](#endnote-1) himself with a local citizen[[2]](#endnote-2); who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. There, he would have gladly filled his belly with the husks[[3]](#endnote-3) that the pigs ate: yet, no one gave him….[[4]](#endnote-4) When he came to his senses, he thought, “How many of my Father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, while I am starving with hunger!” I will get up and go to my Father. I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you. I am not worthy to be called your son any longer: make me as one of your hired servants.” So, he arose, and came to his Father.

But, while he was still a long way away, his Father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. The son began to say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight. I am not worthy to be called your son any longer….” But, the Father said to his servants, “Get out the best robe; put it on him; put a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet; bring out the fattened calf, and kill it; let us eat, and be merry: for my son was dead, yet is alive again; he was lost, now is found.” So, they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field: as he was approaching the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. The [servant] replied to him, “Your brother has come home; your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him safe and well.” Then, he became angry; he refused to enter: so, his Father came out, and pleaded with him. But, he answered his Father, “Look, I served you these many years; I never once transgressed your command; yet, you never gave me [so much as] a kid[[5]](#endnote-5), that I might party with my friends: but as soon as your son returned, who devoured your living with floozies…. You killed the fattened calf for him.”

The [Father] said to him, “Son, you are always with me, everything that I have is yours. It was fitting that we should make merry, and be glad: for your brother was dead, yet is alive again; and was lost, now is found.”

Meditation

Many wonder, how can a good God possibly tolerate the evil that exists in the world which He has created? Some even profess atheism over this seemingly impossible philosophical contradiction. Some try to refute the philosophical contradiction by stating its reverse: how could an evil God possibly tolerate the goodness that exists in the world? Both err in the same way: by trying to turn it into a philosophical contradiction.

Here, Jesus explicitly lays out for us the answer to this question in no uncertain terms. The answer is that the gainsayers err: it is not a question of a philosophical dilemma; it is a question of the torn heart of the Father.

The Father has two sons: Adam Ⅰ and Adam Ⅱ: will He not love them equally? Yes, of course He must: else He ceases to be a Father. Yet one Son, Adam Ⅱ is perfectly, even sinlessly… slavishly, compliant and obedient. The other son, Adam Ⅰ is destructive and rebellious, ultimately bringing havoc upon the whole world: had he been given access to the universe he would have destroyed everything. Yet, the loving Father allows both sons to live out what they think they really want in life; which is what every loving father must do: turn his children loose to be adults, make their own decisions, and stumble over their own mistakes… nothing ventured, nothing gained. The love of the Father wills to take the necessary risks with His children.

In due course the inevitable overtakes Adam Ⅰ, when his life hits bottom, and he is left in ruins, having wrecked the whole earth in which he lives. In despair and desperation, on the brink of death, he begins to limp home in a state of absolute shame: he is a failure, a looser, a nobody.

Yet, the Father, as any real father must, has been yearning for His son every day; hoping, looking, searching for the day when His son will return home. His all-seeing eye knows in what trouble his son is; His omnipresent angels have informed Him of every event; His Spirit searches the hearts of the universe. As soon as the son shows signs of repentance, He runs to meet that which was lost.

It is here in the parable that we’re hit with the surprise switcheroo. Role reversal is a well-known literary device: we ought not suppose that it was invented in the twenty-first century.

The parable has been building its tension, suspense, and climax around a series of two or more repetitions. There are two sons; while we are focused on the one son, what is the other son doing? There are two divisions of wealth; while one results in failure, does the other prosper? Half of this question is answered immediately. The younger son’s confession is important enough to repeat; so, we must suppose that this is central to the plot: that the Father cuts His sons confession short, must be essential to the logic structure. The issue of the fattened calf is repeated twice more: perhaps this is the climactic point. The Father’s “resurrection” speech is also repeated, “for my son was dead, yet is alive again; he was lost, now is found.” The point of rejoicing also appears thrice, concluding the parable along with The Fathers “resurrection” speech, which is especially pivotal, in that it comes from the Father, and wraps up the parable from three joining perspectives: the Father (oft repeated), the resurrection, and rejoicing.

We also see this parable from two perspectives: its first original telling which was intended to confront the Jews; as well as its transcription, which is to be read repeatedly down through the ages… to confront us.

As we repeatedly reread this parable, we begin to see it as a contrast between Christ as Adam Ⅱ and man as Adam Ⅰ: yet, there is reversal in this since Adam Ⅱ, who only appears to be the younger, is truly the elder. Then we get a glimpse of Christ as the fatted calf, the innocent sacrifice who died for us all. Finally, we see Christ suggested in the younger brother who was dead; yet, rises again: for here we see Christ both as innocent sacrifice, Who, brings his people, a less than innocent sacrifice, back to resurrection life with Himself.

It is exactly at this point where we expect a different ending: for we expect Adam Ⅱ as Christ, in perfect agreement of the heart with His Father’s heart, to enter into the complete joy of resurrection. Instead, we are hit with the surprise switcheroo; the role reversal: for Christ extracts Himself from the parable, inserting the Jews and their attitudes (completely unlike the Father’s attitudes) in His place. As we reread this parable countless times down through history, it begins to dawn on us that we are beginning to act, look, and think like Jews. Christianity is repeating the vile acts of the Jews, replete with all the angry rotten attitudes of first century Judaism. It is this temptation, this tendency, which we must war against with all our might: lest we forget that we are a forgiven people… lest through angry bitterness we cast away that very Christlikeness, which has brought us to life… and in that bitterness come finally to a sad and sorry end… just like Israel in the first century.

The real mystery, the real puzzle, the real enigma, the real question is how will the elder Son react? For, Adam Ⅱ is the elder son, not the younger, who is Adam Ⅰ. Will he act judgmentally like any convert, employing His ubiquitous authority to destroy the repentant sinner? No, He will forgive as His Father forgives: for He has been sent to bring the younger home. Here is the real twist in the story: for the elder brother acts in a wholly un-Christlike manner, more like the convert who was once a runaway child. The elder brother in our story has forgotten what he once was; he only knows how to destroy that which is good: he, being self-righteous, does not know how to forgive.

In this strange twist, Jesus deflects the parable away from Himself and focuses it upon the ugliness of Judaism. The Jews, who are supposedly the lovers of God, reveal their hatred of God by their bitter reaction against the Father. In this they are no different than the prodigal, except for the fact that their destructive and rebellious disobedience is internalized with the burning hate of self-righteous superiority, the superiority of Satan when he said, “I will!”[[6]](#endnote-6) This is the condition of many churches on earth today… today is the day we are called to universal repentance. Let every ear hear. Let every eye see. Let every hand feel. Let every nose smell the stench of death. Let every tongue taste the aftertaste of wickedness. Let every soul repent.

Yet, Christ is completely different; His very name is Forgiveness. Therefore, He is the One Who has received all authority. He will judge between repentant sinners, and insincere frauds; He will judge between the forgiving and the unforgiving. He will surely, with His Father, welcome the prodigal home.

[[7]](#endnote-7)

1. He doesn’t even have the status of a slave; if he wishes to feed pigs, he may feed the pigs; perhaps he is even allowed to eat the husks: yet, he is promised no wage and no shelter. The weight of the narrative suggests that the citizen is starving too: they cut a cheap temporary and easily breakable deal. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This implies that the prodigal is in a country where he is not even a citizen, a kingdom where he has no rights, a place where he does not belong. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Some lexicons wax eloquent about the nourishment of carob pods (κερατίων) used to fatten hogs; frankly, this sounds like a preacher’s invention, devoid of substance. It was a famine; the pigs weren’t doing very well either; husks were fed to keep the hog’s bellies full (to keep them from dying, to keep them from attacking and killing each other): there could not have been much nourishment in the husks (or horns). It is true that a hog can live rough in the woods; but, there, a pig will strive to find the richest food available: acorns, truffles, and the like. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Surely someone noticed his plight; yet, in this cold-hearted and hard-hearted place, no one would share a bite with him: not so much as a crumb, or a crust, or a husk… the sentence has no direct object… nothingness, silence, vacuum. It was a great and widespread famine: everyone and everything went hungry. It is the land of isolation, where everybody is reduced to a selfish independence. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Note the striking contrast between the kid (a triviality) and the fattened calf (the special sacrifice for the special festal meal). The elder brother is beyond anger; he is livid with rage; he delivers this irrational chewing out to his Father… he is not angry with his brother… he is angry with God. He is cursing God for what he sees as a cruel injustice done to him. The elder brother has brought the land of isolation, the land of selfish independence home with him. Living in the land of glory and grace, the elder brother would poison everything with his malice. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The following verses speak of another, or possibly two others: yet, notice the similarly destructive pattern of behavior…. Isaiah 14:12-20; Ezekiel 28:1-19 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. If you have been blessed or helped by any of these meditations, please repost, share, or use any of them as you wish. No rights are reserved. They are designed and intended for your free participation. They were freely received, and are freely given. No other permission is required for their use. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)