

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

BREAD AND TO SPARE: THE ABUNDANCE OF THE FATHER'S HOUSE (PART 1)

by David Sproule

Parents and educators know all too well that different people learn in different ways. Some are visual learners - they have to see it to "get it." Some are auditory learners - they have to hear it to "get it." Some are sensory learners - they have to touch it, do it or experience it to "get it." Some may be a combination of these three types.

Parents and educators also know that it takes some people longer to learn certain lessons than it does others. Unfortunately, even in the process of learning some of the most fundamental and essential lessons of life, many individuals have enrolled in and graduated from "The School of Hard Knocks." In other words, they may have learned the lesson, but they learned it the hard way. This type of learning could accurately be described as painful - i.e., painful for the one going through the "learning process," and painful for loved ones watching it all happen.

Regrettably, the younger son in Luke 15 appeared to be a sensory learner, who had applied to and been accepted to "The School of Hard Knocks" campus in the far country. Even if he had **seen** other "graduates" returning from the far country (as a visual learner) or had **heard** about their perilous experience through their words or even lessons from his father (as an auditory learner), the younger son was determined to learn some of the fundamental and essential lessons of life the hard way. It turned out to be a painful experience for him, a painful experience for his father and a painful experience for Bible readers over the next two thousand years.

His courses during his time in the far country started easy, but grew more and more intense. "He had spent all" his portion of his father's livelihood (Luke 15:14). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted, and **bold text** is used for emphasis within quotations.] "There arose a severe famine in that land." He had nothing, and now the land was producing nothing. Now, probably for

the first time in his life, "he began to be in want." What do you suppose were his emotions? What must have been going through his mind? What options might he have considered? Desperate to find a new direction for his life, he took a course in Livestock Management, where he gained much-needed field experience, as he was sent "into the fields to feed swine" (Luke 15:15). At this point, he was perishing "with hunger" (Luke 15:17), and "he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate" (Luke 15:16). This poor lad had reached rock bottom, and "no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:16). The young man had plummeted himself into a sad and pitiful state! Yet, it was on this occasion that he finally started learning.

Most parents and teachers have witnessed that moment when "the lightbulb goes on" in a child's head and it is apparent that the child is beginning to "get it." Luke 15:17 must have been one of those lightbulb moments. Jesus said that the younger brother "came to himself." Not only was he far away from home, he had also been far away from himself. But, in the midst of the darkness of sin and despair, a glimmer of hope began to emerge - he was learning! The first decisive step he made to rectify his miserable situation was coming to this key realization - "**How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!**" (Luke 15:17). The son thought about what he had left behind. He remembered all the tremendous blessings that were his back at home.

He recognized that even the least in his father's house had abundantly more than he did. They had "bread" and he had none. They had "bread enough" and he had none. They had "bread enough and to spare" and he had none. Away from his father's house, he possessed and enjoyed **none** of his father's blessings. In more ways than just physically, this young man was "in want" and "perishing!" He realized that he needed to go home! He realized he desperately needed his father! He realized that the basic necessities (represented by "bread") were provided in abundance in his

father's house, and they were *only* provided to those who were in his father's house!

Meditate momentarily on the multitude of blessings that this younger son had not only squandered in his riotous living but had also completely renounced when he left home. Why would he give all of that up? Why would he desert such a loving father? How long do you suppose it took him to waste "his possessions with prodigal living" (Luke 15:13)? How long do you suppose it was from the time he hit rock bottom to the time "he came to himself?" What would you have done if you were in the same situation - with the same kind of father, same abundance of blessings, same consequences for turning away? Let us consider how we can apply this to our lives today.

The Bread Is In The Father's House

The house of the prodigal's father is an integral part of the narrative in Luke 15. The son dwelt within his father's house for years and was the beneficiary of its bountiful blessings. Then, the son abandoned his father and the house, and consequently suffered immensely as he was separated from those bountiful blessings. It was when he came to himself that he realized the blessings ("bread" is used as a synecdoche for all the blessings, especially physical nourishment, in Luke 15:17) were only his when he was in his father's house!

The application for us today from this parable parallels the abundant blessings that our heavenly Father has for us. Only those who are in our Father's house are beneficiaries of His bountiful blessings. Before looking at some of these blessings, how are we to understand "the Father's house" today and can we be certain that the blessings of God are exclusively found therein?

Keys To Understanding The Father's House

Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus has as its greatest emphasis the Father's house. If we want to know the spiritual

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meaning to us today of the "father's house" in Luke 15, the book of Ephesians is God's commentary to explain it to us, for it was written to those who were dwelling in the Father's house. Paul wrote, particularly to the Gentile Christians, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners" (Eph. 2:19). In other words, "You are no longer living outside the Father's house!" Paul continues, "But [you are] fellow citizens with the saints and members of **the household of God**" (Eph. 2:19). He was writing to the citizens, saints and members of the Father's house! To understand that in light of what the rest of the epistle teaches and to understand who is in the household of God, take time to connect the following passages:

- The letter was addressed to the saints in the Father's house, who were "the faithful in Christ" (Eph. 1:1).
- Those who are "in Christ" are all part "of the same body" (Eph. 3:6).
- Those who are in the body of Christ are in the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23).
- Those who are in the church are those who are "a holy temple in the Lord," who are built together "for a dwelling place of God" (Eph. 3:19-22).
- Those in whom the Lord "may dwell" are those who are in "the whole family" of the Father (Eph. 3:14-17).

To summarize the book of Ephesians on this point: Christians are in the household of God, are in Christ, are in the body, are in the church, are the dwelling place of God, are in the family of the Father (the last of these, "the family," bringing us full - circle with the first, "the household").

The prodigal in Luke 15 learned that in his father's house there was bread enough and to spare. Is that true for the Christian, as well? In our Father's house (i.e., in Christ, in the body, in the church, in the presence of God, in the family of God), are there blessings enough and to spare? If so, does the book of Ephesians provide commentary on that point? It most certainly does, and the careful reader will find this to be true from the very beginning of the letter.

Keys To Understanding God's Blessings

Consider carefully and enjoy immensely the third verse of the book of Ephesians: "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**" (Eph. 1:3). The passage provides four keys regarding the

blessings of God that are essential to grasp at this point in the study (start at the end of the verse and work backwards):

1. The **Location** of God's Blessings: **In Christ!** Based on the study above, this means that, in order to receive blessings from God, one must be in Christ, the body, the church, the temple and the family!
2. The **Origin** of God's Blessings: **The heavenly places** (lit. "the heavenlies")! The blessings of God do not originate from man, nor can they be disseminated at man's discretion. They are God's blessings to give as God sees fit!
3. The **Nature** of God's Blessings: **Spiritual!** While there are definitely physical blessings promised by God (cf. Mat. 6:25-34), the bread that truly matters is that which feeds and nourishes the soul, preparing it for eternity! The greatest blessings of God are those which are spiritual in nature!
4. The **Distribution** of God's Blessings: **Every!** If the word "every" was not in this passage, it could be argued (however, unsuccessfully) that there are "some" spiritual blessings from the heavenlies that can be enjoyed outside of Christ. The rest of the New Testament would not permit such a conclusion, but God makes it abundantly clear in this verse that every single spiritual blessing from Him is found exclusively in Christ! If one is not in Christ, there are absolutely zero spiritual blessings promised to him.

Are you in Christ? Are you in the Father's house? Are you in the body, church, temple, family of God? If so, what kind of learner are you? God tells us that every spiritual blessing at His disposal is given only to those in Christ. Have you learned that? Do you know that to be true by hearing about it? By seeing it? By experiencing it yourself? How mindful are you of all of the blessings that your heavenly Father is showering down upon you in His house?

Have you left your Father's house (cf. Luke 15:13)? Have you packed your spiritual bags and exited to a far country (cf. Luke 15:13)? How are things going? Is your material substance sustaining you (cf. Luke 15:13)? Do you ever sense that you are living in the midst of a famine, perishing and hungering for God and His blessings (cf. Luke 15:14, 17; Mat. 5:6)? Would you gladly fill the emptiness in your life, left vacant by abandoning the Father's house, with the vile, swine-like sustenance of this world (cf. Luke 15:16)? Is there anyone who is giving you anything worthwhile for this life or the next life (cf. Luke 15:16)? Brother in Christ, sister in Christ, will you please come home? If the study above, concluding that no spiritual blessings are yours outside of the Father's house, has started to pull you back (or even if it has not), reflect upon all of the blessings that you are missing! Brother, sister, there is bread enough in the house of our Father and to spare!

Bread Enough And To Spare In The Father's House

It has been said that "familiarity breeds contempt," meaning that the more you know someone or some situation, the more likely you are to lose respect or find some fault. It has also been said that "familiarity breeds apathy," meaning the more you are around a person or situation, the more habitual, expected and uninteresting things tend to become. It is easy to take something for granted!

Do you suppose the prodigal took his father's house for granted? Do you suppose he took all of the blessings associated with his father's house for granted? Perhaps, while surrounded by the wonders of home, he pondered, "Bread? Really? Having bread is not such a big deal! It's rather common! It doesn't deserve a second thought!" Until that day when he eyed the swine's husks, he may have never realized how good he had it at home!

He was perishing in hunger in the far country, when he could have been at home with bread (and all the physical blessings) enough and to spare. The prodigal did not appreciate what he had when he had it; it was not until he didn't have it and then came to himself that he appreciated the true value of living in his father's house!

Is it possible that Christians in the

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Father's house today can fail to appreciate what they have and allow familiarity to breed apathy? Is it possible that a child of God in His Father's house could ponder his surroundings and say, "Blessings? Really? Are there really that many blessings? These things are not such a big deal! They're rather common, from what I can see!" May we not wait until we are perishing in spiritual hunger in the far country to recognize the bountiful blessings that are ours in the house of God! (The spiritual blessings to follow in this study will be limited to some of those mentioned in the book of Ephesians.)

Grace Enough And To Spare In The Father's House

Grace may be one of those blessings (like bread) that we forget about and take for granted. Grace has commonly been defined as "unmerited favor" or simply "getting what you don't deserve." From the Greek word *charis*, Mounce provides this insight - "the acceptance of and goodness toward those who cannot earn or do not deserve such gain" (303-304).

This description comes right from Ephesians 1:6, "The glory of His grace, by which He has made us **accepted** in the Beloved." Without the grace of "the God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10), we could never be accepted or "serve God acceptably" (Heb. 12:28)! If it were not for God's grace, we would be forever condemned! Yet, we read this most beautiful thought - "**by grace you have been saved**" from sins (Eph. 2:5, 8).

Is there enough grace? Is there enough for me? Is there enough for everyone else who needs it? As Paul discussed "the glory of His grace," he emphasized "the **riches** of His grace" (Eph. 1:7), "the **exceeding riches** of His grace" (Eph. 2:7), the "**abundance** of grace" (Rom. 5:17) and that "grace **abounded more and more**" (Rom. 5:20). As he contemplated the power of grace in his own life, the apostle declared, "The grace of our Lord was **exceedingly abundant**, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:14).

In my Father's house (i.e., in Christ, in His church), and *only* in my Father's house, there is grace enough for me, grace enough for all, and to spare!

Mercy Enough And To Spare In The Father's House

Grace and mercy are sometimes hard to differentiate. While grace entails specific

favours and manifestations of God, mercy has sometimes been defined simply as "not getting what you do deserve." Grace can entail the movement of God on your *behalf*; mercy can sometimes entail the restraint of the movement of God on your *behalf...for your own good*. Mounce speaks of mercy as an "emotional response and resulting action after encountering the suffering or affliction of another" (447). The mercy of God (who is "the Father of mercies," 2 Cor. 1:3) involves the **compassion and pity** of God toward those who are in need. "When the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared...according to His mercy He saved us" (Tit. 3:4-5).

Is there enough mercy? Is there enough for me? Is there enough for everyone else who needs it? In Ephesians 2:4, Paul proclaims that God "is **rich** in mercy." The lesson we learn from the perseverance of Job is "that the Lord is **very** compassionate and merciful" (Jam. 5:11). Our Father "according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3).

In my Father's house (i.e., in Christ, in His church), and *only* in my Father's house, there is mercy enough for me, mercy enough for all, and to spare!

Forgiveness Enough And To Spare In The Father's House

Some of the most wonderful and vivid

prophecies of all the Old Testament concern the promise of forgiveness. "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow" (Isa. 1:18). "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). Yet, these promises of God are not fully appreciated until one comes to terms with the devastating consequences of one's sins - "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). Apart from God, there is absolutely nothing that anyone can do to rectify this most egregious condition. Yet, due to the saving power of the blood of Jesus, those in the Father's house have "the **forgiveness** of sins" (Eph. 1:7), have been "**washed**...from our sins in His own blood" (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16), have "**been justified** by His blood" (Rom. 5:9), and "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses** (present tense, continually) us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Is there enough forgiveness? Is there enough for me? Is there enough for everyone else who needs it? Those in the Father's house are assured that He has "forgiven you **all** trespasses" (Col. 2:13) and that He will **continue** "to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). And the heart

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Deuteronomy 5:32

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of God "desires all men to be saved" from their sins (1 Tim. 2:4).

In my Father's house (i.e., in Christ, in His church), and *only* in my Father's house, there is forgiveness enough for me, forgiveness enough for all, and to spare!

Redemption Enough And To Spare In The Father's House

While in its New Testament usage the doctrine of redemption often parallels the doctrine of forgiveness, it does stand out with a beauty of its own. In the New Testament, a variety of Greek words are used for which we typically have only the one English word. The greatest emphasis on redemption in the New Testament is to convey **deliverance** through Christ. "In Him we have **redemption** (apolutrosis) through His blood" (Eph. 1:7), "being justified freely by His grace through the **redemption** (apolutrosis) that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). "You were not **redeemed** (lutroo) with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). "Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might **redeem** (lutroo) us from every lawless deed" (Tit. 2:13-14). Through the sacrifice of Christ, we have been **delivered!** The New Testament not only emphasizes the deliverance part of redemption but also the **purchase** part of redemption. Our Savior, now exalted in heaven, is being praised, "For You were slain, and have **redeemed** (agorazo) to God by Your blood" (Rev. 5:9). The American Standard Version probably more accurately represents the weight of this word - "and didst **purchase** unto God with thy blood men." The very same word is found in 1 Corinthians 6:20, where the word **redeemed** is not found, but its meaning is - "For you were **bought** (agorazo) at a price." *Delivered! Bought! Redeemed! Beautiful!*

Is there enough redemption? Is there enough for me? Is there enough for everyone else who needs it? The assurance we have is that Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from **every** lawless deed" (Tit. 2:14). By the shedding of His blood, He "didst purchase unto God... **men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation**" (Rev. 5:9, ASV).

In my Father's house (i.e., in Christ, in His church), and *only* in my Father's house, there is redemption enough for me, redemption enough for all, and to spare!

Love Enough And To Spare In The Father's House

Is there any greater, any more - loved topic to meditate upon than the love of God? It is beyond our comprehension that "He loved us, **even when** we were dead in trespasses" (Eph. 2:4-5)! Oh, what love! Paul declares that "the love of Christ... passes (present tense, continuous) knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). Its wonder, its beauty, its fullness are beyond any human mind to hold any more than a small trifle.

Is there enough love? Is there enough for me? Is there enough for everyone else who needs it? Paul spoke of God's "**great** love with which He loved us" (Eph. 2:4). Jesus Himself said, "**Greater** love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus said it does not and cannot get any greater than this. *It is immeasurable!* You cannot find any device or combination of devices by which you "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is **the width and length and depth and height**" of the love of Christ (Eph. 3:17-19)! *Oh, what love!*

In my Father's house (i.e., in Christ, in His church), and *only* in my Father's house, there is love enough for me, love enough for all, and to spare!

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