

The Brother of the Prodigal Son

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I. Two Parables which Illustrate God's Mercy

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt20:1-16)

v1 'the kingdom of heaven is like ...' the parable is about salvation, being granted entry into eternal life

v2-9 the Master brings on labourers throughout the day, the last are paid first – a denarius

v10-12 the first workers presume they will get more, and grumble when they don't (lack of mercy)

v13-16 the Master reminds them that all agreed to work for the same

- The message for Christians is that though we have laboured for many years, God in his mercy will grant the same eternal life to all those whom he calls, and they repent, even at the last minute. We need to rejoice over these people.

The parable of the prodigal son (Lk15:11-32)

v11-16 the younger son squanders his share of his father's wealth

v17-24 the younger son returns to his father, repents, and the father joyfully receives him back

- The younger son represents someone who has left the Church and returns; the father represents God who joyfully welcomes the person back.

v25-28 the older brother hears the partying; enquires about what has happened; and becomes angry (lack of mercy)

v29-32 the older brother complains that he has served faithfully for many years 'without a single party'; the father explains that he has been living in his reward daily and that the inheritance is his

- The father still represents God; but, who does the older brother represent? As in the vineyard, he is someone who has faithfully served God in the Church for many years. We are reaping the benefit of God's way of life on a daily basis and eternal life is waiting for us. This parable gives hope that people who have left will return – possibly at the last minute. They will receive eternal life but they have missed out on many years of living God's way. The point of the parable is that we must receive them in mercy and rejoice over their return.

II. God's Mercy

Seminal scripture Ex34:6 – all other references derive from this: two key words

רחם **raham**; and, חנן **hanan** (these are prime roots: various forms of the words exist)

From the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Harris, Archer, and Waltke editors, Moody, Chicago, 1980:

- **hanan**: (page 302) a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need; an action from a superior to an inferior; the

overwhelming number of uses ... have Yahweh as the subject; the adjective describes the gracious acts of Yahweh - merciful, compassionate (ESV, KJV, usually 'gracious')

- **raham**: (page 841) deep love usually of a superior for an inferior; connotes the feeling of mercy; God has ... pity on ... those whom he has called as his children; God's unconditional choice – grace; [the] adjective is used only of God ... setting forth one of his attributes (ESV, KJV, usually 'merciful')

Ex34:6 'merciful' – raham; 'gracious' – hanan; same in33:19 – these two verses define God's mercy and grace (the concepts cannot be separated)

Dependant scriptures: 2Chr30:9 (Hezekiah's appeal to the vestigial northern remnant after the Assyrian deportation Am5:15); Neh9:17 (Ezra's covenant renewal prayer); Ps86:15, 103:8, 111:4; Joel2:13; Jonah4:2 (the point of the book) Rm9:15-18 these concepts are the basis of Paul's writings on mercy and grace

III. A Warning to Christians

The parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt18:21-35)

v21-22 context: forgiving a 'brother' – someone in the Church

v23 'the kingdom of heaven' the parable is about salvation, being granted entry into eternal life

v24-27 the king requests payment from a serious debtor (owing several billion dollars) – the debtor pleads for mercy, which the king grants

v28-30 the serious debtor finds a fellow servant who owes him a few thousand dollars and refuses mercy

v31-34 when the king finds out the attitude of the serious debtor he sends him to prison until his debt can be paid

v35 the message: our sins against each other are trivial compared to what God has forgiven each of us – we must demonstrate mercy to one another

IV. An Example of God's Mercy

The great multitude from every nation (Rv7:9-17)

v9-12 the great multitude, clothed in white (repentant Rv19:8, Joel2:12-13) and worshipping God

v13-14 who are they? People who repent during the tribulation – the work of the Church will have stopped during the tribulation so these people must have been exposed to the truth prior to the tribulation.

V15-17 they are granted eternal life. They are represented by the younger son who repents at the last minute – they enter the kingdom but have little experience in God's way of life. Again, this give us hope that many who have left will repent at the last; but they have missed out on years of living God's way. We benefit daily from living God's way; but we must learn to have God's mercy and grace to accept those repent at the last minute.