

“Two Brothers and One Graceful Father”
Romans 11

He was a man who longed to be a Father. And one day his wish came true. A Son, no less, was born, who would carry on the family name and receive the inheritance. The Child was deeply loved, deeply cared for and deeply forgiven. The Father was present when the Son came into the world. He passed out cigars and bragged about what his Son could become but his Son had not even taken his first step yet. “He would become King, one day. Yes, a King who would rule the world,” his Father told people. But not yet. His Father would teach him how to crawl, how to maneuver his way around this big, scary world. Sure there would be many accidents, falls, many tumbles, but his Father would pick the Son up, encourage him and the Son would try again. He taught his Son how to communicate first by pointing and then speaking simple words at first and then phrases and then sentences. Like most parents some of the first words the Boy learned was “please” and “thank you” even though most of the time the son would forget. “What do we say,” said the Father, “Please may I have that?” And then he learned to walk. It seemed to take forever. His Father would lovingly take him by the hand and lead him about or crouch down and gently encourage his Son to move forward. Again there were more than a few accidents – some worse than others. Bangs and bruises were common place and of course it was the Father who was blamed. The Son simply wanted to crawl or constantly be picked up but the Father would have nothing to do with this. “You need to learn to walk,” said the Father. You need to learn dependence. But dependence was not the only thing the Father tried to teach the Son. In fact the Father not only taught the boy but modeled for the boy of what he wanted him to learn. The Boy grew to be strong, like his Father. He learned discipline and he learned to work hard for everything he had. He stayed close to his watching how he related to others and honour the name he was given. But one thing became almost impossible for the Son to emulate. You see the Father was not like most Fathers, maybe even nothing you have known before. Although this Father expected much of his Son, the Father was full of love, full of encouragement and full of grace. The latter was something the Son could not understand. When others cheated the Father he would forgive. When others hated the Father he would love all the more and even the most undeserving were shown mercy. The Son could not understand such grace. And it’s not that grace did not flow freely in their home. There were many times that the Son did not honour the Father. And although discipline was displayed it was always done with such care. For some time it was just Father and Son – that is until it was announced that another would be invited in. “A little brother is coming to live with us,” the proud Poppa announced. Now the attention and love would be shared between two Sons, or so the Older thought. Even though the Father told the older Son that his love would not be divided in half but multiplies, the Son did not believe this. So the Son encouraged the Father not to

have another Son. "Can he live with someone else," asked the older Brother. "No, he is your Brother," said the Father. So let's just say it was not a happy day for everyone when the Younger arrived. Attention was now given to someone else. The Baby cried, was demanding and believed by the older Son to be loved more than Him. The older Son was not involved in helping the younger Brother do those things that he himself had learned. It was the Father who helped the younger Son crawl and later walk. It was the Father who taught the Son how to speak and taught him the rules of the house. But the Younger, was different than the Older. The Younger did not see "rules" but "suggestions." Unlike the older Brother, the Younger got in far more trouble. Whether at school, on the street, or at home the younger Son became known as the troublesome one. Most of the time the older Brother simply considered his younger Brother as a stranger. When asked, "Is that your brother" he would respond, "I've never seen him before." The older Brother did not stick up for the Younger when he was being picked on, teased or even beaten up. Most couldn't blame the Older because the Younger was deserving of everything he received, well most things. What dumbfounded the older Son most was the amount of love, forgiveness and grace shown to the Younger by the Father. Most of the time the Older would say to the Father, "It's time to show tough love Dad." "Let him stay a night in jail." "Don't go talk to his teacher again to get an extension on his paper." "He's not going to learn obedience," if you keep showing him such overwhelming grace." But the Father would not listen. And it was not only the older Son who said these things but everybody. The Father was just too.... too... nice. And then something happened that would change the family forever.

Although things were good on the farm, although both boys were set for life – if you know what I mean, the Younger son asked something of the Father that the Older would never have asked, in fact, even dreamed of asking. I think the Younger asked his Dad when the Older was busy out in the field. Because if the Older had been around, I am sure, he would have pummeled his little Brother. You're not going to believe what I am about to tell but it really happened. Just ask the older Brother. Like I said you're not going to believe this but I think you're kind of getting to know the little Brother, by now. One day, out of the blue, the younger Son asked his Father for some money – not a loan but a gift. He asked the Father for half of what the Father owned. It was a lot of money then, as it would be today. It would mean selling off some property, cashing in his rainy day fund and getting out of the bank the money he had been saving since his Boy was born that was supposed to be spent when the Boy went to university. But to the younger Son's amazement, and later the older brother's shock, the Father agreed. Now do such a thing with the Older you knew what he would do with the money. The same could not be said of the Younger. The only thing we knew for sure is that the Younger would not treat the money like the Older, that is responsibly. Ask anyone. Anyone from the school principal to the Rabbi would tell you the same thing: He would waste it. So by now you're probably not surprised

if I told you that is exactly what happened. The younger Son went through the money like it would never end, but it did end. And the Younger didn't even buy anything – anything he could later re-sell but spent money on experiences that would make us all blush. The money ran out of course. So like the frequent attendee at Casino Rama the Younger gambled the last bit of money he had thinking that all he needed was one break – which of course never came. His so-called friends (that helped him spend the money) had deserted him as quickly as the cash was spent. And he was now alone and finally had to work – of which he couldn't even find, simply to survive. He was now homeless and hopeless. But he never forgot his Father or should I say forgot what his Father was like. He “came to his senses” one day and realized all he had done but he also remembered his graceful Father. Now you might think that the Father had forgotten his Son, considered him as good as dead. But you would be wrong. The Father spent most nights out on the front porch waiting for his Son to return. So when that day finally happened – the younger Son coming home – the Father was overjoyed. The Father did not simply welcome him home but he threw him a party, an actual party. And what of the older Brother? One word best describes the older Brother when he happened in on the party. He was “jealous”! Who did the younger Brother think he was? He was undeserving of anything, let alone grace. But the Father did what He had done for as long as both Boys had known the Father. It shouldn't surprise anyone that the Father showed grace and mercy to the Younger because that's not simply what the Father did but who He was. And for that the Older was jealous – jealous how the Father expanded the family and showed such grace.

Now you might think the story I told you is from Luke 15: the familiar story of the Prodigal Son and it was. But did you know that it's also the story of Romans 11? Paul tells us the story of two brothers or two peoples. There was an older Brother. Let's call them the Jews: God chosen people. God taught them how to crawl and he watched them get bruised and battered. He taught them to walk and then to run. He reminded them who they were and He promised that He would not desert them, no matter what. They may have looked like responsible adults who stayed close to their Father much of the time, obeying all His commands, but in truth they really ever understand or knew the Father. They thought that if they could be good enough the Father would be happy with them. And if they were good enough they somehow deserved more than they actually deserved. And what boggled their minds most (even though they received it often) was the grace of the Father especially to other – others like the younger Brother. You and I are the younger brothers, if you haven't figured it out yet. We are the Gentiles, whom Paul speaks about. We are the ones who arrive on the scene later and who don't always do the right things or say the right things but there is one thing we know – and it's the Father. We know something about the Father that the older has trouble with. We know the grace of the Father. We know we are undeserving – even to be engrafted into His family tree but He

does it anyway. And although we are wasteful and immature there is one thing we know – we know the Father forgives. So every once in awhile we too come to our senses and we come home and sincerely ask the Father to forgive us. And He does. It stupefies our older Brothers. They just don't get it. How God is so gracious!

But that's all part of God's plan. Remember that "jealousy" that I spoke about earlier well that same jealousy is what the Father uses to bring some back to the Father. There are some older brothers (a "few" or as Paul calls them a "remnant") who see the grace of God and are jealous for that grace in their own lives so they come to the Father. They are reminded just as the Father did not give up on the younger son God did not give up on them either. They recognize God is faithful in his promises and although we might like to boldly proclaim our place in the family there are still many more yet to make their way into the Family. There are still more brothers and sisters to be adopted into God's family. You might not like to hear that because we like having God "all to ourselves." In fact some of us now feel like the older brothers and sisters and who aren't pleased with those God has elected, chosen or displayed grace upon. They may even be as we once were but we forget what we once were. Yet God chooses whomever He wishes. And displays grace on whomever He desires. For God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and mercy. Why? Because God is faithful. So we pray, we continue to pray for those yet to be engrafted, those yet to have faith – like a parent, a spouse, a child or even a stranger. We pray that might be "jealous" as they look at our lives – jealous of the grace we have received because they want the same in their life. And with that the family grows, more branches are added and all because of a graceful Father. Let us pray...