

“In a faraway land, in a time not like ours and in a place not like our own, there lived a benevolent and righteous king. Unlike other kings around him, he feared the Lord and followed his statutes. Worship was the matter of his heart, and song the medium of his tongue. Every morning when he rose he would open his window, lift his voice and sing praises to his God and every morning it seemed like the entire universe would stop to hear his sweet melody. People on the street would stand still; those arguing on the way would silence their disputes and would inevitably join in. Prayer was another avenue in which he flowed so that anyone who stood in his presence for more than a couple of moments could tell that he had been with God. Criminals feared coming before him because his seemingly natural connection with the Almighty would cause them to fall on their knees in repentance and shame. He made thieves pay back what they stole. He sentenced murders and rapists to a life time of restitution to the victim and their families. Although his actions and judgments were a reflection of his mercy filled heart, many people feared coming before him least their sin be found out.

“The king loved his subjects. He treated his servants more like sons and daughters rather than slaves as the other kings around him. He allowed the poor and the rich alike to feast at his banqueting table. He clothed those who were naked, and built homes for those who were without. For his generosity and loving kindness poverty levels were minimal. Hunger was not a sentiment that many people in his kingdom felt unless they choose to forgo food voluntarily. People appreciated him and were thankful for him, that is everyone except his children.

“His children were an interesting sort. Although they had grown in the palace of the king and were trained in all that was good and right, it did not reflect in their behavior. Instead they behaved as if they belonged to wolves rather than a people of a great inheritance. They wore clothing that no one else in the kingdom would dare to wear, tattered with holes and drenched with stains. They lived in houses that were built with scraps of metal and wood even though their father's house had plenty room to spare. These were the kingdom's drunks and these were the renegades. They ran about the kingdom, looting homes and destroying businesses. Most of all the king's children did not respect all of the good that he had done for the

kingdom, rather they despised their father's generosity and labor of love. They could not understand the level of compassion that he had for such worthless souls and saw it as a weakness.

“Even though they treated the father so, the king persisted in his love for them. Constantly he would urge them to leave where they were and come back to his home, back to his table where there was plenty of room and safety was paramount. No matter how rational and sound his pleas were, come back they could not because their hearts were already so far away. For this ignorance and despondency, they continued to live in the filth and shame of their wicked ways. Neither could they find forgiveness, even though the king had plenty of it to show their way.

“At a loss over the state of his children and growing lonely due to the emptiness of his palace, the king began to adopt more children. It did not matter the past of the children he adopted so long as they accepted his gift and left their lifestyle of recklessness behind. He adopted prostitutes, thieves, slanderers, cheats, liars, and murders. Regardless of their former state each and every child had a place at his table and a room in his house. Even still, his house was not full and so he continued to go to try to persuade his prodigal sons and daughters to come back home. He let them know how much he loved him, and he let them know that there was still room for them if they wanted to leave what had ensnared them for so long behind. Yet, they would not come. Although they could see right in front of them that the lives that they chose for themselves were destructive and evil, their eyes had become so full of darkness and their hearts of despondency that they were blind to the truth, thereby unable to receive it in order to be taken back into the kingdom.

“The time came, as is the way of the earth, where the king's days drew to an end. Rich in years, the reality of death was finally catching up with him and taking a toll on his body. Knowing full well that his time left on his throne was short, he went to his natural children one last time pleading for them to come. He begged them to leave the little that they had and trade it in for abundance, goodness, grace, love and a place at his table. He let them know that forgiveness was theirs and that in their coming he would not hold any of their past failures against them. Unfortunately he went away in sadness and tears, distraught over the fact that his children still failed to see the error of their ways. But what more could he do? The king would not force himself upon them, he loved them too much for that! If they wanted to live outside of the kingdom and if

they chose to live outside of the inheritance, he would let them. If they chose to persist in their evil ways, as much as it broke his heart, he would let them go and allow them to do as they wished.

“The inevitable finally came. Death overwhelmed the king's body and overtook him in his sleep. The night before his departed, he went out into his courts and asked his servants to beckon for his children one last time. When they would not come, he went into his room, drew his feet to his bed, went to sleep and breathed his last. In the morning when his servants came to wake him, they found that he was gone. They called for the coroner who determined the approximate time and cause of his death. The word spread quickly that the king was gone because it was the first morning in over 50 years that the kingdom was not embraced with the melodious worship of the king. Even so, an official announcement went out into the kingdom concerning his death. There would be a banquet in the king's palace held in his honor. It would also be at that banquet where the king's last will and testament would be read and where those who were receptors of his inheritance would be found out.

“When the king's children received word of the news of their father's death, they were elated. They said amongst each other that finally the kingdom was theirs and that they would be able to run it the way that they wanted to. They dressed in their princely robes, garments that they had not worn in years and left for the banquet at the palace. Upon arrival at the palace, the king's children were forbidden entrance. When they inquired as to why they could not come in, they were told that there was no more room at the king's banqueting table. Although upset, they decided to join the company of subjects who feasted outside of the palace and wait for the will to be read. They reasoned among themselves that once they received their father's inheritance that they would vanquish the servants who told them that the table was too full for them, the king's children.

Finally after everyone drank and ate to their hearts content, the last will and testament of the king was read in the ears of the entire kingdom. The king's children waited in anticipation to hear of how their father handed over his throne and all of his earthly possessions to them but their waiting yielded no results. The king, and rightly so, gave away his inheritance to his adopted children leaving his natural heirs penniless. His children were outraged and questioned why they were left with nothing. They were told that the kingdom did

not belong to them but such as those who accepted the free gift of the king as did his adopted sons and daughters. Still impassioned with rage the children threatened to tear down the palace walls with their bare hands but before doing so, one of their father's servants walked out and handed each child a white envelope with gold trim. Within themselves they said that the envelope must contain money but upon opening it, they found a letter which said:

*My dear children:*

*If you are reading this, it means that I have passed on. Although life has been good to me and I entering into my heavenly reward, I am at the same time saddened about my departure for it does not mean good things for you. The inheritance of my throne and of everything I owned does not belong to you, and it breaks my heart that it is so. I have given it to my other children, my adopted sons and daughters, who have been more faithful to me in the short time of my knowing them than you have been in all of the years that I have walked with you.*

*Again and again, I came to you. I offered you my love, I offered you my grace and each time you refused me! All day long I stood at your door knocking, asking for you to let me in and all day long you turned a deaf ear to me. How I longed to gather you to me, to provide shelter, food and an inheritance fit for princes and princesses but you would not let me. Though I love you dearly, words cannot express how much I do, I have given you over to the manner of your ways.*

*You wanted to live like slaves even though you were children of the king, and so you are condemned to a lifetime of perpetual slavery. You wanted to wear rags of holes and stains even though I had more than enough clothes to adorn you with, and so for the rest of your days you will never put on anything else but the rags that you have condemned yourselves in. You wanted to live in a house made of scraps of metal and wood, even though my palace had room enough for you and your entire families with more space to spare. You will live in the houses you have wished, and you will die in those houses, and ultimately be buried there as well. I have spoken and even though it pains me, I have taken great lengths to make sure these things come to pass. My kingdom, though it was rightfully yours, will not be overrun with such evil that you have entertained all of your lives. And so, go your way and live the life that you have always wanted without me and without your inheritance. I love you but this is how it must be, as justice and righteousness need to be fulfilled.*

*Sincerely,*

*Your father*

Upon completing the reading of the letter, each of the king's children began to weep out loud. How could they have been so blind and stubborn to their own ideals all of these years? Their father had never done them wrong, neither had he ever caused them any evil, so why did they choose to go astray. Convicted at last over their guilt and shame they asked their father's servants if there was any way that they could be redeemed. Was there any way that they could still enjoy the privileges that they had foolishly wasted away, but it was all too late. There was nothing that they could do or say to change the final will of their father, they were beyond the point of redemption as every possible effort had been taken by the king to make sure that his last orders were carried out exactly as he wished. Humbled and broken over the future that lay before them, they went away to embrace their fate.

Yet the adopted children, the children who threw off their lives of shame to embrace the king's kindness, enjoyed a different reality. Before them laid a future that was incomparable to anything that they could have ever imagined. Everything that belonged to the king, prestige, kingdom, and rule was now at their disposal and they lacked for nothing. They had servants that waited on them day and night, and came to their beck and call. Though adopted, his children they truly were as they took on the disposition of the king and were conformed more and more into his likeness. They fostered a spirit of compassion and love that was extended to everyone they came across. They developed the heart of worship that the king possessed so that it was not too long after the king's death that once again the kingdom was awakened with song and praise to their God every morning. Most of all, everything that was definitive of their past had been cast off and washed away so that no residue of it remained. All that remained was the truth that they belonged to the king, and at the end of the day it was the only thing that mattered."