

The Father's Love

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- [0 : 00] Let me pray now for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, in our own flesh, we cannot grasp your amazing love for us.
- Heavenly Father, we need you by the power of your Spirit today to open our blind eyes, to dig open our ears, so that we might hear and believe.
- Lord, I cannot, I am incapable of conveying the depth of your love for your people.
- Amen. So won't you do what only you can do in the reading and preaching of your Word, so your Word might pierce the hearts of every single man and woman and child here.
- Speak to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are able, please stand and join me as I read Luke 15, 11-32.
- [1 : 47] And he said, There was a man who had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.
- And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country.
- And there he squandered his property in recklessly. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.
- So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pigs.
- And no one gave him any. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread?
- [2 : 46] But I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father. And I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.
- Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran, and embraced him, and kissed him.
- And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring quickly the best brood, and put it on him.
- And put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it. And let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again.
- He was lost, and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dance.
- [4 : 02] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed a fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.
- But he was angry, and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.

Yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed a fattened calf for him.

And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive. He was lost, and is found. Scott's holy and authoritative word may be seated.

[5 : 09] Every culture and every society and religion has a system of morality that tells us what is right and what is wrong.

But all the moral systems of this world can only produce two kinds of people. The first kind that they produce are the law keepers. They are those who keep the law better than some others, relatively speaking, and they keep the laws in order to get what they want.

They look good on the outside, but their self-perceived observance of the law spawns an arrogant, corrosive pride that makes them self-righteous and judgmental and patronizing.

They look down on other people who are not as good or wealthy or successful. The moral systems of our world also produce a second kind of people.

And these second kind of people are the law breakers. People who break the law to get what they want. But their lawlessness spawns deep guilt and shame that plague and haunt them and eat them up from the inside.

[6 : 31] And the point I want to prove to you this morning is that the gospel or the good news of Jesus Christ produces a third kind of people.

People whose pride has been blown up because they recognize that they are worse sinners and worse failures than they have ever imagined. But simultaneously, a people whose guilt and shame have been defused and defanged by the unchanging love of God who sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins on the cross and then rise again from the dead to save all those who put their trust in Christ alone.

Do Christians still struggle with pride and guilt and shame sometimes? Of course. But that's to the extent that we are not living in light of the good news of Jesus Christ.

And yet, every day, every year, we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another as we behold the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Why? Because there is a fundamental pride-crushing and shame-vaporizing power in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 57] And I want to prove that to you this morning through this famous parable in Luke 15, 11-32. The parable is popularly known as the parable of the prodigal son.

Prodigal meaning wastefully extravagant son. But the parable is really about two sons. The law-breaking one, the younger one, and then the law-keeping one, the older one.

And it's really even more than the two sons. It's about the father's love and his response to both of them. So we're going to first look at the law-breaking son and then we'll look at the loving father and then thirdly, the law-keeping son.

The parable begins in verse 11. There was a man who had two sons, ordinary enough. And it takes a sharp turn in verse 12. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

The man had two sons and the Jewish law at the time stipulated that the first son received a double portion of the second son in terms of the inheritance, which meant that in this case, the younger son was entitled to receive one-third of the inheritance of the father's property.

- [9 : 09] And this younger son is now asking his father for his share of the inheritance. And a son asking his father for money is obviously not an uncommon event, but there's something deeply evil and selfish about what he's doing here.
- Because the way inheritance is worked back then is similar to how life insurance works in our present context. A father names his two sons as the beneficiaries of his inheritance or his life insurance, so to speak.
- And all of it belonged to them legally at some point in time. But that property does not become available and disposable to the sons until the father died.
- And that was the case also with his inheritance. But the son is saying, give me now the share of the property that is coming to me. I know it's coming to me, but I want it now.
- He's essentially telling the father, I wish you were dead already. You're taking a little too long. I don't want you.
- [10 : 17] I want what's yours. The presumption of the request is seen in the father's response in verse 12. It said that he divided his property between them.
- That word property translated more literally is life. He divided his life between them. He gave his livelihood, his very life, all that he had son of her, all that he had between his two sons.
- And then the true intent of the son is seen clearly in verse 13. He doesn't even wait long. There's no pretense here. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took the journey into far country and there he squandered his property and records.
- He's not trying to receive his inheritance early so he could stay as a loyal son by his father's side and then honor him and provide for him, take care of him in old age.
- No, he gathers all he had, meaning he has commercial overtones of basically selling everything and turning and converting everything he has into cash. And then with that wad of cash, he goes to a far country.
- [11 : 23] He is sick of home, sick of running the family business, sick of living on a family farm, sick of his father, sick of his brother. He's out of that.
- Not a neighboring town, a far country, away from the watchful, concerned gaze of his father. And he said that he squandered his property in reckless living.
- The word squander is to literally scatter, right? And in reckless living is referring to luxurious living. This guy is throwing money into the wind, throwing all caution and cost aside, running up his credit cards.
- And later in verse 30, the older son says that his younger brother devoured the property with prostitutes, which tells us about some of the sordid ways in which this younger son spent his father's hard-earned money.
- This is a selfish lawbreaker. This desire to get away from the father is at the heart of every sin, even the seemingly more benign sins that we commit in our own life.
- [12 : 37] If you are not a Christian, you're here this morning, then you are living your life without reference to God. Even if you live a relatively moral life, and I'll get to that when we talk about the older son, you are still living in prideful unbelief, which is at the root of all sin.
- You're living as if God didn't exist. And in doing so, you are doing exactly what this younger son sets out to do, to live without his father. In crude terms, your life is an expression of this younger son's unspoken wish.
- I wish you were dead so I could have what is yours. God is from God. You are enjoying the good gifts of God in this world. Every good thing in this world is from God who is good, who alone is good.

Love, family, delightful food and drink, pleasing sounds, music, a stable job, your intellect, health, beauty in art and nature, all of these are from God.

They all belong to him, and yet you are enjoying those gifts without acknowledging the one who gave him. That is the ugly reality behind all unbelief.

[13 : 52] Even for the Christian, the desire to get away from the Father to do what we want is at the heart of everything. When we indulge our sinful desire, when we do what we should not do, when we say what we should not say, when we don't do what we should do, when we don't say what we should say, we don't do what to varying degrees, we are all saying to God, living under your authority in your household is a little too restrictive.

I want to have my own way. I want to get away from it. Sex outside of marriage is forbidden. Marriage is only between one man and one woman.

I should give my hard-earned money to the ministry of the church and service to the poor. I shouldn't get drunk on alcohol. I should submit to the governing authority.

I should consider others more significant than myself and look out for their interests and not just my own. I should forgive that person that has wronged me again and again. Okay, stop right now.

That's a little too far. I've had enough of your authority. I've had enough of you. of you. every act of sin from the least to the greatest is a vote of no confidence against God.

[15 : 21] God, I don't think you're as good as you say you are. I don't think you're as generous as you say you are. I don't think you're as gracious as you say you are. And so you know what?

I'm going to find my own way. I'm going to make my own life. I think I can do a little better for myself than what you have for me. Every act of sin is an act of rebellion against God and that's why it's so damaging to your relationship with God.

If you think that you can create a better life for yourself apart from God's revealed will for us in scripture, then this story of the younger son is a stern warning to you.

And like all sinners, the younger son soon realizes how miserable life apart from the father really is. He says in verse 14, when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need.

He has left the safety net of his family, his community, he has spent all of his money and now this young man begins to taste the bitter end of his sweet indulgence. poverty forces him to seek employment.

[16 : 32] It says in verse 15, so he went out and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into the fields to feed pigs. pigs. That's as on dignifying as that sounds.

He used to be an esteemed son of a wealthy, respected landlord. Now he's a hireling of one of the citizens of the far country. He's been hired, as the context implies, by a Gentile, a non-Jewish master, which we can tell by the fact that he's sent into the field to feed pigs.

Not only do pigs physically bathe in mud, which is why we associate them with filth, but they were considered ritually unclean, ceremonially unclean by Jews, unfit for consumption by God's people because of Leviticus 11 verse 7.

For this reason, Jewish people never grew pigs. So whenever in the Bible you see pigs, they're always in the Gentile region, and this is no exception.

The younger son has taken on what is possibly the most humiliating job that a Jew can take. but he sinks still lower.

[17 : 44] He says in verse 16 that he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. Not only was he humiliated by the work, he still went hungry despite his work.

The pigs are treated and fed better than he is. We don't know exactly what those pods were that the pigs were eating, but I think we can safely assume that it wasn't fine dining.

The younger son is so hungry that pig slop looks appetizing to him. He is in the sad condition and the ultimate fate of all who are alienated from the heavenly father's love.

In our father's house, we are cared for. We are loved. We have to enjoy the richest affairs. We're treated as sons, but when we leave our father's house and we deliver ourselves to the strangers out in the far country, we're reduced to servitude by a cruel master named Satan.

Sin is always a bait and switch. The enticing pleasures of sin leave us less and less pleased and satisfied and more and more enslaved.

[19 : 06] So we long to be fed with the pods that came. Then in verse 17, the focus of the narrative begins to shift from the law-breaking son to the loving father.

He says, but when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread? But I perish here with hunger. The hired servants, it's a reference to the lowest rung, the lowest class of common laborers.

And yet, when they are hired for the day, they eat bread aplenty at his father's house. The son is finally remembering the generosity of the father. Why am I slaving away here for a strange master in a far country when they don't even feed me?

My father is a better master, and if I'm going to be a hired servant anyway, I might as well be my father's hired servant. Then at least I won't go hungry. So he resolves to return home in verse 18 and 19.

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

[20 : 14] He admits that he has forfeited all worthiness.

He does not deserve to be received back into the family. Normally, a son who has so dishonored his father should bring lavish gifts in return to his father's house in hope of reconciliation and forgiveness.

But this son has nothing to bring. He comes empty-handed. And that's the case for all sinners. We must first get to the end of the road of self before we can return to God.

Have you been, have you gotten to that place of despairing, despairing of your own righteousness, despairing of your own worthiness before God?

Only then, only when you have reached that point of deep despair, can you start to rise from the dead and live and receive eternal life.

[21 : 42] Put all your hope in the lavish love of the father. It says in verse 20, And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

The word long, a long way off is the same word that was translated as far in verse 13. The repetition reveals the father's heart. The younger son took a journey into the far country because he didn't want anything to do with his father.

Disgracing his father. And yet, his father has not disowned him. He has not given up on him. It seems that the father still spends much of his days scanning the horizon in the far country to see if he could just see his son, perhaps finding his way back.

And one day when the son comes into view, still far away from him, he spots him and the father's heart wells up with compassion and then he runs to embrace him and to kiss him.

And in doing so, this loving father breaks all ancient Near Eastern norms. Elderly Jewish men, well, elderly men in general don't rhyme very much, but elderly Jewish men never run.

[23 : 10] Not in this culture. Think about it, right? He's not wearing athletic shorts and do balances. He's got these open toed sandals.

Have you ever tried running with flip-flops? There was my shoe. Can I go get that? Come back up. And on top of that, he's wearing these long robes. If you tried running with the dress, you haven't had pure men, you don't know, but you gotta roll it up, grab it, and then you're running.

Like, just imagine how undignified that looks. That's embarrassing. And in honor, shame culture, you just don't do that. But the father is overflowing with compassion.

And it overrides, his compassion overrides all cultural norms. And so he runs, however clumsily, through the dusty roads of the ancient Near East. And imagine that sight from the perspective name of the sun.

Who is that man running, heating up guys? Must be an emergency. Wait a minute. That's an elderly man.

[24 : 33] He should be a little more careful. Wait, I think he's running toward me. Wait, he looks familiar.

Is that my father? Is he running toward you? Why? And when the father arrives, he embraces him and kisses him.

The word embrace is not this polite hug. It means literally to fall upon someone's neck. It's a bear hug that takes the breath from your chest.

Embrace. Chest to chest, cheek to cheek, tears streaming down their faces. And the father kisses his son affectionately. The younger son must have been filthy, a penniless servant that had been working with the pigs.

And it doesn't stop the father. Before the son is able to say a word, the father is already welcoming him. loving him. And then in verse 21, the son begins the I'm sorry speech that he's been rehearsing his whole journey to the father.

[25 : 56] Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. But before the son could even finish his rehearsed lines about take me on as one of your hired servants, the father is already motioning to his servants in verses 22 and 23, bring quickly the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet, and bring the fattened calf and chill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

Taking his son back as a hireling doesn't even occur to the father. He doesn't berate him about his wastefulness and foolishness.

He doesn't consign him to slavery for the rest of his life until he can't pay back that money. He doesn't nag him. All that preoccupies the father in that moment is the joy of having his son back.

And he reinstates the younger son with all of his privileges of sonship, putting on his best robe, a symbol of status, the ring on his finger, which probably has the signet, the seal of the family, a sign of membership, the shoes on his feet to cover his blistered, dusty feet.

The younger son understands at that point finally that his father will take him back, but not as a servant, only as his son. And if that went enough, the father throws a party to celebrate the return of his son.

[27 : 35] They slaughtered the fattened calf, the fattened calf. Meat was a rare treat in the first century Israel, not like our day. The fattened calf was eaten only on the very special occasions, like major holiday.

The meat of a young calf is more tender than the meat of an adult cow. And the fattened calf is one that has been specifically pampered and fattened for just a special occasion.

would have been enough to feed the whole village. This is one of the most compelling pictures of our heavenly father's love in the Bible.

When you feel like you haven't been a good kid, when you feel burdened with guilt, do you feel like you cannot approach God? do you think that you need to cry a certain amount of tears and feel this certain level of remorse and regret that you have to spend a certain number of hours and days in self-imposed exile from God in the doghouse before you can come back to God?

Do you think that you need to pay God back for everything with all these good works that you can do before you can be received and welcomed into his family? Before you can really be loved by him?

[29 : 10] Some of you have already learned this love of God and the grace of God, but you're living in with yesterday's mercy, when his mercies are new every morning.

Do you think that God sees you and looks you up and down with disdain? with this pleasure? When God the Father loves you, runs after you, welcomes you, why do you see God as a heart of him?

God is gracious and merciful and forgiving and loving God. No matter how far you're straight from him, the moment you confess your sins and turn toward him, he's right there seeing you far off already well in upper compassion.

he's running to embrace, to kiss, to welcome and rejoice over you. Why? Because you are his son.

Because you are his daughter. That's the heart of the loving Father. And then we see the third portrait of the law-keeping son in verse 25.

[30 : 40] It says, now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing, and he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

Unlike the younger son, who left his father's house, this older son is still dutifully working at the house, working in the field. But as he approaches the house, he hears music and dancing, and he wonders what this surprise party is all about.

if he's like me, he's probably thinking to himself, well, I don't see anybody else that this party would be worth throwing for. It's got to be for me.

Maybe that's what he thinks. He gets his hopes up and then he grabs one of the servants, hey, what's going on here? And the servant tells them, some rude awakening, verse 27, your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.

And the older son is not happy. It says in verse 28, he was angry and refused to go in.

[32 : 01] Look at the dynamic shift. the younger son was formerly outside the house, but now he has been welcomed in. The older son, who's always been at the house, now finds himself on the outside of the house looking.

The positions are reversed. And the father comes out to entreat him. And the older son airs all his grievances in verse 29 and 30.

Look! Many years, these many years I've served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, yet I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him. Can you relate to his complaint?

While this son of yours was scattering all your wealth with prostitutes, I was working hard building your assets. While he blatantly besmirched our family name, I was here serving you under your name.

[33 : 18] And yet, you have never even grilled hot dogs for me. And you're going to serve this guy prime wagyu beef.

That's my fattened calf. He's already squandered all his inheritance. This is all mine. The relational strain is obvious in the way he addresses his father.

He doesn't say that he should have respectfully father or sir. even. He simply says, look. And then, he's referring to his younger brother.

He says, not my brother, but this son of yours. He's distancing himself from his father and from his brother.

This reaction of the older son reveals that he was just as lost as the younger son. The younger son says, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

[34 : 31] Treat me as one of your hired servants. Right? Because he doesn't deserve to be called a son, he thinks his father might hire him as a servant instead. And look at what the older son says.

Look, these many years I have served you. And I never disobeyed your command. He thinks he deserves to be called the son, but only because he was slaving away for him all these years.

Neither of them understand the nature of sonship. Neither of them understands the love and the grace of the father.

They both relate to God as servants. God. I can only find acceptance as a servant if I serve him, if I do what he wants me to do.

But the father loves them, not because they have served him, not because of their utility, but because they are his son.

[35 : 44] And this is what the older son failed to grasp.

If he understood that all that the father gives is a gift, that his inheritance is a gift, not a wage for him to earn, not a salary, a gift, then he would have understood the father's love.

Then he would have not been so begrudging about his brother's return. If you are like this older son, and you think that you're going to find your standing, gain your standing with God, your acceptance with God, by observing these commands, by serving him and slaving away this life, then you will, in the end, find yourself on the outside of the house of him.

Because only those who know the father and know his love and relate to him as a beloved son and a beloved child will endure. The law breaking younger son represents the tax collectors and sinners who are flocking to Jesus, repenting of their sin and finding acceptance in him.

The law keeping older son represents the Pharisees and the scribes who were begrudging Jesus' forgiveness of such people. The younger son left his home because he imagined that his father is stingy and strict.

[37 : 33] He thought that his father was needlessly depriving of the pleasures of life. The older son stayed at home and worked hard because he too imagined that his father is stingy and strict.

He believed that the only way to pry those blessings out of his tight grip is by obeying him always and doing what he commanded. At the heart of both licentious lawbreakers and legalistic lawkeepers is a distorted view of God the Father.

That's why in his book *The Whole Christ*, theologian Sinclair Ferguson writes that legalism and licentiousness are in fact non-identical twins that emerge from the same womb.

Licentiousness says God doesn't want to give me what is good so I'm going to take things into my own hands and run after those things apart from God. Legalism says God doesn't want to give me what is good so I must take things into my own hands and earn those good things and force it out of his hands.

Some of us tend to be more like this older son. if you tend to begrudge the generosity and graciousness and mercifulness of God if you tend to be self-righteous to see other people's sins with acute clarity but you're oblivious to your own and you tend to be.

[39 : 27] And you need to hear this tender words from the father verse 31 and 32 son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. The older son refused to call him father but the father still addresses him as son.

The older son referred to the younger son as this son of yours but now the father reminds him that this is after of your brother. The older son accused the father of never giving him even a young goat but the father reminds him a young goat this whole thing is yours.

The father entreats him and through this parable God is entreating even the legalistic law keepers among us even the proud and self-righteous people among us.

Don't be grudging that the sinners are coming to me and being saved. Rejoice with me. Join me in my mission to go and seek and save the lost. Your inheritance is not something you have earned.

[40 : 50] It's a gift that I freely bestow on you because I am your loving father. This parable ends on a cliffhanger with the father's entreating.

We don't see what the Pharisees and the scribes do or how the older brother responds. Rather, it ends with this invitation. But this lavish love of the father comes at great cost.

Because the father must bear the shame and the loss that the younger son incurred. the older son, too, must bear the shame and the loss that his younger brother has brought upon him.

After all, all that is left of the father's inheritance is entirely his. Remember, he took the one-third and left.

The two-thirds is the older son. the only way that the younger son gets any inheritance is if the older son decides to share his.

[42 : 04] There's a heavy cost that comes with the father's forgiveness. And that's the cost we see God the father bear on the cross of Jesus Christ.

The father gives up his most treasured, his only son, his beloved son, Jesus Christ.

The heaviest loss that the father could have incurred. He gives his son that he might save us from our sin and death. And Jesus, he is the true elder brother that the Pharisees and the scribes should have been.

And Jesus, instead of saying, well, they've squandered their property, all that is left is mine. Instead, Jesus gives up his throne in heaven, comes down to earth, takes on human flesh.

Even though he lives a life of perfect obedience, he died the death of a sinner and a slave on the cross. He pays the penalty that we deserve.

[43 : 22] He pays the debt that we incurred in squandering our property with prostitutes. All kinds of sort of sin.

need. That's why it says in Romans 8, 29, Jesus is the first born among many brothers. It's through Jesus that God the Father intends to save us and join us to his family.

That's why he's called that first born among many brothers. That's why in Colossians 1:18, it says that Jesus is the first born from the dead because it's Jesus, because Jesus is the only divine son of God, fully God and fully man, and yet he died the death that he did not deserve.

It's through his death and resurrection that we who are dead in our trespasses and sin are made alive together in Jesus Christ. Alive by the spirit of the power of the Holy Spirit.

For the son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. I know many of you know exactly what that's like.

[44 : 42] I was lost and now I'm found. I was dead but now I'm alive.

And that is worth celebrating in our church. And that Thank you.