

A Father's Love
Luke 15:17-24

As a father, I could weep each time that I read and study through accounts like this one given by the Lord Jesus here in this parable that we have been studying. Because stories similar to this one are far too common to us fathers.

With two sons, a daughter, and several grandchildren, I have had to watch as some of my own dearly loved family members have wandered away along paths very much like this one taken by this young man. And I have grieved so very much for my dear ones.

Here, the Lord Jesus, though a son Himself, knows well the heart of a father. In the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 9, Jesus is also said to be our "Everlasting Father". And the words of this parable sweetly tell of His Fatherly heart of love for us as He so diligently seeks to save each one of us lost and wandering "sons".

Folks, this is so very important for us to understand and to treasure within our hearts. As we have said, this parable is an allegory. The Father in this story is God. And the son who demands his inheritance and then walks away is you and me.

Because as much as you and I might not want to admit it, we are too often very much like this young man. We came into this world with broken souls. And as we have grown and become accustomed to the ways of this world, our hearts have become filled with so many of the wretched sins of this world, causing us to become lost and wandering aimlessly within our own pigsty.

But thanks be to God, through these scriptures, the Lord Jesus has given us His precious Gospel to tell us about our loving Father who is waiting for us at home and who will, as we come to our senses receive us back out of our pigsty and back into His loving family, placing on us His best robe and giving us His signet ring as one of His true sons, "heirs of God and co-heirs with His dear Son the Lord Jesus.

Listen again as we read the words of this parable! Here, we know from last week's study that this young man had demanded and received his full inheritance from his father. He had then taken it and squandered it all in prodigal living. And then here, after having to live a starving life tending to pigs

in a pigsty, the young man finally came to his senses. Listen, beginning in verse 17 of Luke chapter 15,

¹⁷ But when he (the prodigal son) came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,

¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men." '

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet.

²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry;

²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:17-24)

Suffering, when ministered through the loving hands of our trustworthy God is an instrument of grace and mercy, a finely fashioned tool designed for the singular purpose of restoring life to an otherwise dead or dying soul.

And even though that suffering may at times be severe, it is still trustworthy grace. And when allowed to run its full course, that suffering grace can bring about miraculous changes. It can turn a once arrogant and rebellious heart back from the paths of foolishness onto a path of wisdom, back from the path of arrogance and rebellion onto a path of repentance.

And that was exactly what this severe mercy and grace did in the life of this young prodigal son as he suffered the tender rebuke of God. One might object and say, "Oh but, this did not seem so tender a rebuke!" But yes, it was tender! How much, much worse it could have been! He could have completely perished in his foolishness, and deservedly so.

But God, in His tender mercy and grace, knew just the right measure of suffering that it would take to bring this young man to his senses.

And that is what we read here in verse 17 where we're told that when he came to himself, when this young man came to his senses, he began to understand not only the foolishness of his own ways, but he also began to understand and to appreciate the trustworthy heart of his father.

Working there each day in the filth and squalor of the pigsty, not even getting decent food to eat from his employer, the young man began to consider the noble character of his father.

¹⁷ . . . he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! (Luke 15:17)

This is no small compliment to his father's character. Hired men were at the lowest level of employment. They were "day laborers", workers that had no real relationship with the master.

Those who are true "servants" of a master often lived within the house of the master. And they enjoyed all the many benefits of a home, good food, a warm place to sleep, the comfort of always knowing where the next meal would come from.

But not so the average "hired man". Their usual arrangement was simply to work, receive their wages and then be sent on their way back to their own homes.

But here, this gracious father also provided the "hired men" with food and more than enough bread with some to spare, some perhaps to take home to their families.

As this young man pondered through all of these matters, changes began to take place within his heart, and repentance began to do its work. Those words again in verse 17, "But when he came to himself,"

When this young man finally came to himself, "came to his senses", repentance began to replace the foolishness that once filled the young man's heart. And that repentance then brought about the only acceptable response that true repentance allows, the young man arose and began his journey back to his father's house.

I say, the “only acceptable” response that repentance allows because too often people stop at the point of feeling badly for their sinfulness. They do not carry their repentance on out to its full completion.

Whenever possible, it is best that a penitent sinner humbly go and make matters right with those whom his sin has mistreated. This young man said,

¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,

¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men." '(Luke 15:17-19)

This is humility and this is true repentance being carried to the next step. And it must always be this way, else true forgiveness and reconciliation cannot take place.

As I ponder and imagine all that was taking place with this young man, I am especially appreciative of the part that reveals that his misbehaviors had taken him to a “far away land”. That meant that he had a long time to contemplate his sinful ways as he journeyed the long way back home. That again was God’s grace, first allowing the young man a full measure of time to think about his sins and to come to repentance before Him, before God. Because that is where we must begin.

And then, as he neared his home place, take note of the noble and good heart of the loving father when he saw his beloved son returning to him. Even before the young man could say all of his words of repentance, the father ran forward to receive his son back to himself. Listen!

²⁰ And he (the young man) arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

The father saw his son afar off. Can we not see the yearning heart of the father? He, no doubt, had been watching and waiting, for a long, long time, hoping for and anticipating the day that his beloved son would return to him.

We read here that the father had “compassion”. Compassion is a love-filled mixture of happiness, of sadness, and of loving unction to reach forward to bless and to serve the one for whom we have compassion.

Consider this response of the father. The father “ran” to his son. In reading about the customs of the Hebrew people of that day, for several reasons, men of such nobility did not run, and especially not so to greet a rebellious son.

In the Hebrew culture at the time, atonement for rebellious conduct such as this required a great number of penitent works. And the father would have been required to not accept his son into his presence until all of the necessary works of penitence had been fulfilled.

And also, the father would not have “run” to his son for another important reason. A nobleman’s robe was always to be kept close to the ground so that his legs would not show. It was a high standard of modesty that all the men and the women of the Hebrew society were required to hold strongly too.

And in running to his son, the father would have needed to have held his robe high enough so as not to trip as he ran, exposing his bare legs, subjecting himself to shame before his neighbors. But in his loving compassion, the father thought nothing of the shame. He was willing to be humiliated in order that he might demonstrate his love for his beloved son.

And does that not also remind us of the Lord Jesus as He willingly suffered the shame as He died naked there on the cross!

Also, this prodigal son was, no doubt filthy, wearing pigsty stained clothes, smelling like the pigs he had lived with for so long. But yet, we read here, without hesitation, the loving father, ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

Can’t you just imagine the picture and the passion of this reunion, the father burying his face in the neck of his beloved son, caring nothing about the stench and the filth?

The son was then able to complete his confession and repentance as he said,
²¹ . . . 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (Luke 15:21)

But again, note the loving response of the father!

²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. (Luke 15:22)

Those words of the father speak a strong message about his unconditional acceptance of his son. He did not say bring “a clean robe” or a “good robe”, but rather he said, “bring out the best robe”. The “best robe” is the one that belongs to and is worn only by the master of the house.

This loving father was willing to put his own robe on the back of this once rebellious, but now repentant son, signifying that he was willing to share his kingdom with the young man.

That folks, is grace beyond measure, grace beyond human understanding.

But listen, God is willing to do the very same with us. Remember that in this parable, this father is an allegory representing God The Father. And here, He is willing to dress you and me in robes of righteousness and call us sons. In 1 John chapter 3 we read,

¹ Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God. (1 John 3:1)

And in Romans 8, we're told that,

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.
(Romans 8:16-17)

Though this young man was still dirty, filthy and smelly, this loving father had his “best robe” draped over his son, signifying the son's full restoration back to being a master in the father's house.

And note here also that not only did the father drape his son in his “best robe”, he placed the family signet ring upon his finger, the ring that gave the son the full right and authority to make decisions for all that the father possessed.

This is humility beyond our understanding and imagination. Because again, in the Hebrew culture of that time, the young man would have had to go through a long process of restoration and penitence. Such a son would have had to have begun as a hired man and perhaps in years to come, worked his way back up into the family. It was the way of family honor in the culture of that day.

And for this father to humble himself and freely receive this wretched son back into the family would have brought great condemnation upon the father from his neighbors. But the father cared nothing about such condemnation. He freely received and welcomed his son back into his arms. He said, "for this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."

Folks, this truly is what takes place as we who are in sin, humbly turn our hearts back to God our Father in repentance. With loving compassion, He receives us back. And not just as hired men, but as true sons, with all of the provisions and the benefits that accrue to a true son of God.

And note here also, the loving father calls for a great celebration banquet.

²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry;

²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:23-24)

This celebration bespeaks the words that we read earlier in this chapter, that there is great rejoicing in heaven when a sinner is reconciled to God. The angels sing and rejoice. Verse 7,

⁷ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

And in verse 10,

¹⁰ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10)

Folks, may I say again that as we consider these words of this parable, though they seem focused on the prodigal son, they are really much more about the deep, deep love of a father. And especially, it is a picture of God's deep, deep love for you and me, love that would sacrifice the life blood of His own dear Son that we might have life. That is real love, and this is true grace beyond measure.

May we close our study today, by reading the words of a very special song that bespeaks the kind and manner of love that we can see within the words of this parable. The song is entitled "How Deep The Father's Love". Listen to those words . . .

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
And make a wretch His treasure

How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One,
Bring many sons to glory

Behold the Man upon the cross,
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice,
Call out among the scoffers

It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection

Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

May we pray.