

The Father's Love

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help, we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the Gospel according to Luke, in chapter 15.
- Luke chapter 15, and if we take as our text the words from verse 20. Luke 15 at verse 20. And he, that is the prodigal, 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 robe 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. The parable of the prodigal son is one of the most well known and one of the most much loved of all the parables.
- [1 : 2 2] And it's a parable with which I'm sure that we're all very, very familiar. In fact, I'm sure that it's a parable within which we can all see ourselves being portrayed by Jesus.
- Because either we are still in the far country, far away from the father, or we have come home and we know the father's love, and we have received all the blessings of being in the family, the father's family.
- Wherever we are spiritually tonight, we can find ourselves somewhere in the parable of the prodigal son. And you know, that was the reason Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables.
- We're told that Jesus never spoke to the crowds without using a parable. And as we were saying last week in Boer when we were looking at the parable of the wise and the foolish builders, we were saying that the parables of Jesus, they weren't just sermon illustrations used to make the teaching of Jesus easier to understand.
- Or they weren't just a little story that were used to entertain his crowd in order to keep their attention. Instead, the purpose of a parable was to get the listener deeply involved and see that they are the ones who are being portrayed in the parable.
- [2 : 4 3] They are being represented in the parable. And that when they see themselves in the parable, it will compel them to make a personal decision about following Jesus.
- And so the parable of the prodigal son is seeking to ask us the question, where are we in the parable? Where are you in the parable?
- Are we still in the far country or have we come home to the father? Is our heart still far away from God or have we come to know the love of the father?
- Are we still a slave to sin or are we a son or daughter of God? Are we dead or are we alive? Are we still lost or have we found our way back home?
- And these are the questions that Jesus was implying when he told this parable. But what we ought to see is that the parable of the prodigal son, it's actually one third of a parable.

[3 : 40] Because the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin, they are part of the same parable which Jesus told. Because we're told at the beginning of chapter 15, it says, Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable. Therefore the parable which Jesus told is to be understood as the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two lost sons.

And it's two lost sons because the Pharisees are being illustrated by the actions of the elder brother at the end of this parable.

But the reason Jesus tells the parable, it was all for the sake of the sinners. The scribes and the Pharisees, they had rejected the sinners.

And they had labelled the sinners as outcasts. And the Pharisees were complaining and grumbling to Jesus that he shouldn't be sitting with these people, these lowlife people.

[4 : 47] He shouldn't be sitting with them and eating with them. But in this threefold parable, Jesus teaches that God loves sinners. And that God searches diligently for them.

And when they are found, he welcomes them into his family. Which means that this parable is a parable of grace. And it displays to us that God is more than willing to take rejected sinners and adopt them into his family and make them his sons and daughters.

And it was J.C. Ryle who said in his commentary on this parable, And I don't apologise for quoting him, this 19th century bishop, so often. Because the more I read J.C. Ryle and what he's written, the more I love, I would love to have heard him preach.

I'd love to have heard this J.C. Ryle preach because he has such a winsome way in which he writes. Because he says about this parable, he says, The parable before us is commonly known as the parable of the prodigal son.

It may be truly called a mighty spiritual picture. Unlike some of our Lord's parables, it does not convey to us one great lesson only, but many.

[6 : 07] Every part of it, he says, is peculiarly rich in instruction. And that's what I'd like us to see this evening as we consider the theme of adoption.

I want us to see that this parable is rich in instruction. So let's listen to Jesus tell this parable and just consider it under three headings.

The headings of prodigal, pardon and position. Prodigal, pardon and position. So we look firstly at the prodigal.

Read again at verse 11. 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 that he had and he took a journey into the far country. And there he squandered his property in reckless living.

[7 : 06] Now if we were the original hearers of this parable in the first century in Palestine, every statement of this parable would come as a shock.

And as we listen to what Jesus is saying, we always have to have in mind that there are two contrasting groups who are listening to this parable. There are the Pharisees who are so religiously upright that they can't be told anything.

And they already think that God has accepted them when he hasn't. And there are the sinners who are longing to be told. They're longing to be told that God has not rejected them, but that he is willing to receive them.

And so as Jesus tells the parable, he explains that the experience of the prodigal son, it goes from bad to worse. And as these two contrasting groups, as they are sitting there listening to the parable, the Pharisees see the prodigal as a description of the sinner.

And the sinners see the prodigal as a description of themselves. Because Jesus explains that there are two sons, and the younger son asked for the inheritance from his father.

[8 : 20] Now because there are only two sons, the younger son would receive one third of his father's estate as an inheritance. And the older son would receive two thirds. But as it is in most cases, the inheritance of a father, it would only be distributed to the children when the father had passed away.

And so what's unusual here is that the younger son initiated this division of the father's inheritance while he was still living. which not only showed the arrogant disregard that the prodigal had for his father as the head of the home, but it also indicated that the prodigal wanted his father dead.

The prodigal had no care or concern for his father. His father was of no value to him. And all the prodigal wanted was his inheritance. Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.

But what's more of a shock is that the father grants the son's request. And he divides his livelihood. And as the Pharisees and sinners are listening to Jesus' parable, the Pharisees see the prodigal as a description of the sinners.

And the sinners see the prodigal as a description of themselves. And of course Jesus is saying to us tonight, who do you see in the parable? Do you see a description of others?

[9 : 44] Or do you see a description of yourself? But the parable of the prodigal, it continues. As Jesus tells us that not many days after receiving his inheritance, the prodigal gathered all his belongings together.

And the word gather together, it carries with it the idea of turning your property into cash. So within a few days, this younger son, having received his father's inheritance, which the father had worked all his life to maintain and keep, so that one day he would pass it on to his sons.

And yet within days, the prodigal had sold his father's property and all that the father had given to him, and he had turned it into cash. And when everything was sold, which indicates that the younger son doesn't plan on coming back, when everything was sold, he journeyed to the far country.

He's journeyed as far away from the watchful eye of his father as possible in order to indulge in prodigal living. Because life in the father's house, it's restrictive, it's confining, it's full of laws, it's suffocating, it was too much.

It was too much law and not enough freedom. And so the prodigal, he leaves home in search of a better life by indulging in reckless living. And we're told that he squandered his wealth in the most extravagant and unrestrained manner.

[11 : 17] And there's no doubt that the prodigal, he had fun, and he enjoyed the pleasures of the far country, where he spent his money, and he lived recklessly, and he lived loosely, and he lived lawlessly, and he lived without any thought of his father's house.

And in all his reckless spending, the prodigal kind, he tried to gain the whole world. And yet in the process, he was only losing his own soul.

And as we can see from this parable of Jesus, the parable of the lost sheep, sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, they're all an illustration of the lostness of the soul.

It's an illustration of the sinner who is living in rebellion against God. And as the Pharisees and sinners, as they're listening to the parable of Jesus, the Pharisees see the prodigal as a description of the sinner.

And the sinners see the prodigal as a description of themselves. And Jesus is asking us, who do you see in the parable? Do you see a description of others?

[12 : 26] Or do you see a description of yourself? But again, the parable, it continues. Jesus tells us that the pleasure of the far country, it only lasted for a season.

And Jesus admits that what the prodigal had done was reckless and wasteful. But it goes from bad to worse for the prodigal. Because Jesus says, in verse 14, 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 ponds that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

And as J.C. Ryle said, every detail is important, because the parable is rich in instruction. And what we're being instructed here is that because of the famine in the far country, the prodigal was now under the judgment of God.

And we've seen that over the past couple of weeks in the prayer meeting, when we were looking at the life of Naomi and Ruth. Because Naomi and Ruth, it was set in the days of the judges.

[13 : 40] And when a famine came to Israel, and Naomi and her family, they travelled to Moab in search of a better life. And that's how the love story of Ruth and her kinsman, Redeemer Boaz, that's how it begins.

But all the Jews know, famine in Israel means the judgment of God. And so Jesus is emphasising that the prodigal is now under the judgment of God for his reckless living.

But more than that, he goes and makes himself a citizen of the far country, which is far worse. Because in making himself a citizen of the far country, the prodigal, he's giving up his identity.

Not only as a son of the father, but also as an Israelite. And under the judgment of God, he's actively severing his relationship to Israel. God's covenanted nation and God's covenanted people.

Which in the eyes of the Pharisees would have been far worse than all his reckless living. Because such an act was forbidden in Israel. Once an Israelite, always an Israelite.

[14 : 45] But this prodigal, he's acting like a traitor to his people and to his country and to his God. He's a complete exile. He's a Gentile now. Not a Jew.

He's no longer one of God's people. He's an outcast. But if that wasn't bad enough, it gets even worse for him. Because we find the prodigal working in the fields of pigs.

He's with unclean animals. He's with the animals without the cloven hoof. And God's word says that the prodigal and his actions, they're unclean.

Unclean. Unclean. And so in only a few words, Jesus describes the prodigal as under the judgment of God.

Detached from the people of God. And unclean in the eyes of God. Therefore, by all accounts, there's no way back for him now. There's no chance of repentance.

[15 : 42] There's no chance of pardon. There's no chance of coming home. Because there are no sacrifices in Israel that will deal with his sin of willful disobedience.

He has sold his soul. And as the Pharisees and the sinners, as they're listening to this parable of Jesus, all you can see is the Pharisees. They're all nodding.

Nodding their heads in agreement. You can hear them saying, yep, that's the sinners, all right. That's what they're like. Because the Pharisees see the prodigal as a description of the sinners.

And the sinners see the prodigal as a description of themselves. But as I said, Jesus is asking us, who do you see in the parable? Do you see a description of others?

Or do you see a description of yourself? Do you see a description of yourself? And so we've considered the prodigal. But as Jesus continues through this parable, he highlights the pardon of the prodigal.

[16 : 48] So prodigal, pardon. Look with me at verse 17. 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. I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

Treat me as one of your hired servants. And as Jesus tells this wonderful parable, which is rich in instruction, he shows us that the life of the prodigal is going to change dramatically.

With everything he has experienced and everything he has gone through, it's going to change. And Jesus tells us that the pivotal moment in the prodigal's life is when he comes to his senses.

He comes to the end of himself and he looks at his life and the direction it's headed in and the mess that he's in and he sees nothing, nothing but emptiness.

[17 : 53] Emptiness. This prodigal had gained the whole world at the cost of his soul. But for what? Because now he had lost the world and his soul.

And he's looking at where he is amongst the uncleanness of the far country, sitting with the pigs and all he sees is the emptiness of life. The prodigal knows that he's under the judgment of God.

He knows that he's no longer part of the people of God. He knows that he's unclean in God's sight and he knows that he is a broken, poverty stricken, outcast who is unloved and unwanted.

And Jesus says that the prodigal comes to the end of himself. But how was he brought to the end of himself? How was the prodigal brought to the end of himself?

Now I don't want to theologize the parable too much. But we can see that the illusions are there. Because the only way for the prodigal to come to the end of himself and see the mess that he was really in was for the Holy Spirit to work in his heart.

[19 : 03] And we've seen this before in our study of the Catechism. The role of the Holy Spirit is to illuminate the darkness and the desolation, the emptiness of our heart.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the depravity and the poverty of our condition and make us see our need of Jesus and the need to have a right relationship with him.

Because our, by our very nature, we have been living like the prodigal. But when the Holy Spirit works in us and through us, he makes us see that our greatest need is not what's on offer in the far country, but what is freely available in the Father's house.

And sometimes that's a hard lesson to learn. But sometimes that's the way God works in our life in order to bring us to our senses and ultimately bring us to himself.

You know, sometimes the Lord will strip us of the things that we hold dear in order for us to see that he is far more important. Sometimes we will be emptied of our own resources and emptied of our own efforts and emptied of the authority over our own lives and we have to hit rock bottom and having tried everything that the far country has to offer and seeing that it's completely useless, it's then that we come to Jesus.

[20 : 31] We come to Jesus because when the moment of extremity comes and our need becomes so great, we realise to whom else can we go but to Jesus.

But to Jesus. And sometimes it's a hard lesson to learn, but oh it's a good lesson to learn because it makes us see the importance of our soul and the insignificance of the world.

Jesus says in verse 17, 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.

Having come to his senses, the prodigal knows that there is something far better for him in the father's house than in the far country. Previously it was the other way around.

The prodigal saw something better in the far country than in the father's house and now everything has changed. But what has changed? His desires have changed.

[21 : 42] His heart has changed. His eyes have been opened. His heart has been softened. And now he's willing to listen to his father because he's willing to be a servant in his father's house.

And as we said, this is all a work of the Holy Spirit. This is what the Holy Spirit does in our heart. He changes our heart. He opens our eyes. He unstops our ears. He renews our will.

Where we were once unwilling to listen to the father, desiring to go as far away as possible from him. But when the Holy Spirit works in our heart, he makes us willing to obey.

He makes us ready to live for him and ready to serve him. but this change of will, with a willingness to obey and serve, we see that it's then followed by a conversion because he turns away from his old life in the far country and he turns back to his father's house.

It's a change, a complete change of direction. It's a complete turnaround. But there's not only willingness and conversion, there's repentance.

[22 : 55] There's a confession of sin. He says, 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 you know, as the Pharisees and the sinners, as they're listening to this parable of Jesus, the Pharisees, they still see the prodigal as a description of the sinners.

And they think that this change in the prodigal, it'll never work. Impossible. They say impossible. Because the prodigal is right. He's no longer worthy to be called a son.

He's no longer worthy to be given a position in the family and status within the whole. But neither is he worthy to become a servant. He's forfeited his status by his reckless living.

He's forfeited his opportunity for service by his unclean behavior. He's an outcast. He's a sinner and he will remain a sinner forever. But you know, the sinners, the sinners, they still see the prodigal as a description of themselves.

[24 : 09] And you know, they're hanging on every word of Jesus, wondering what will happen to this prodigal. They're hanging on every word, thinking to themselves, wouldn't it be amazing if this prodigal was accepted, even as a servant?

Wouldn't it be remarkable if the prodigal received a position of service in the father's house? Wouldn't it be wonderful if he was able to work alongside all the other servants in his father's house?

And you know, we see the contrast so clearly between the Pharisees and the sinners. The Pharisees thought the prodigal was too far gone, and the sinners, they're hopeful, just longing and hopeful for the humble position of service.

But Jesus turns the whole parable on its head. He reveals that the prodigal is not going to be a sinner, and he's not going to be a servant, but a son.

And all the time Jesus is asking us the question, who do you see in the parable? Do you see a description of others, or do you see a description of yourself?

[25 : 25] So we've considered the prodigal and his pardon, but as Jesus continues the parable, he highlights the position given to the prodigal.

Prodigal, pardon, position. position. Look with me at 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.

And in these words, Jesus turns the whole parable on its head. the Pharisees and the sinners, they're listening to it. And you can almost imagine the jaws of the Pharisees dropping in disbelief.

But for the sinners, they're smiling from ear to ear because this is the best thing that they have ever heard. The father, he would have every right, every right to reject his prodigal.

He would have every right to send him back, tell him to go home to your own country, which you're a citizen of. He would have every right to tell him that he's no longer welcome because he's an outcast, he's unclean, he's severed his relationship not only with his nation but also his father.

[26 : 49] But that's not what happened. He arose and went to his father. He arose and went to his father. Now I want us to just linger on that point for a moment because in these words Jesus tells us about the decision the prodigal made.

In the last section in verses 17 to 19 we saw that the prodigal came to his senses. He came to the end of himself and he saw the emptiness of his life. And we said that that was like the sinner in whom the Holy Spirit is working.

And in the experience of the prodigal we saw that there was conversion. He had this desire to turn away from the far country and returned to the father's house. There was repentance.

He confessed his sin. Father I have sinned against heaven and before you. And he has confessed his unworthiness of forgiveness and his willingness to serve the father.

But what I want us to notice is that all of it was in his mind. All of it was in his mind. All of it was what he intended to do.

[28 : 01] But it's only when he actually arose from the far country and set his face towards his father's house that things changed. Because sitting thinking about going to the father's house it didn't change his life.

Considering what he says when he eventually gets to the father's house didn't change his status of a sinner to a son. No it's when he acted upon what he was thinking.

It's when he did something about his condition. It's when he arose from his uncleanness and went to throw himself at the mercy of his father. That's what changed him.

That's what brought a change into his experience. That's what secured his conversion and assured his forgiveness and changed his position as a sinner to a son.

He did something about it. He did something about it. And as we listen to Jesus he's asking us who do you see in the parable?

[29 : 08] Do you see a description of others or do you see a description of yourself? And do you see your need to arise and go to your heavenly father?

But just in case we have any doubts Jesus tells us the response of the father when we get to him. When we come to him and he says it won't be rejection and it won't be sadness.

It will be love and forgiveness. He arose and came to his father while he was still a long way off. His father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Aren't those words just beautiful? When he was still a long way off, the father saw him. He saw him and he had compassion on him.

The father saw him. He saw the prodigal whom he longed to come home. He saw the prodigal who had taken all his inheritance and who had wished him dead and yet he still loved him.

[30 : 16] He still waited for him to come home and he had compassion on him. despite everything the father was ready to forgive his prodigal son. He was ready to receive the prodigal and welcome him home.

And the father was so eager to have him home that he doesn't even wait for the prodigal to reach him. So moved with compassion that he runs towards him.

And for the Pharisees hearing this, it would have disgusted them. To see an elderly man running was undignified, shameful, shameful for a father to run and to show his legs.

But Jesus highlights that that's not what's of interest to the father. That's not what's of interest to him because his lost son is far more important to him.

And when the father reaches his son, he embraces him and he kisses him. And although the prodigal thinks that he's no longer worthy to be called his father's son.

[31 : 23] And he wants to take this low estate of service in the father's house. Notice that the father doesn't respond. He doesn't say anything to the son's request.

He doesn't say anything to his son. He doesn't say anything to his son about the past. He doesn't say and ask why. He doesn't say where have you been.

He doesn't say how could you have been so disobedient. all he says, bring quickly the best robe. Put it on him.

Put a ring on his hand. Shoes on his feet. 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. the father calls his servants and orders the prodigal to be dressed with the items that are appropriate for a son to wear.

[32 : 22] The robe given to him, it indicated a position of sonship restored to him. The ring on his hand, it emphasized that he had authority and a right to the father's estate once again.

But the sandals, that's the lovely part. He was barefoot. Bare feet like a slave. But given sandals to make him a free man.

And isn't it interesting that before the prodigal son went to the far country, he thought that the father's house was a position of oppression and slavery. But in actual fact, the father's house was the position of true freedom.

It was a position in which he was received into his father's family and made a son. It was a position of welcome and blessing. It was a position of grace and forgiveness.

It was a position of love and rejoicing. Because the prodigal was no longer a sinner, not a servant, but a son. My son was dead and is now alive again.

[33 : 36] he was lost and is found. And you know, this is the wonder of the doctrine of adoption. That sinners are made sons and daughters of our heavenly father by the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit not only makes us come to our senses, and he makes us willing to come home to our father. father. And he not only takes us from death to life again, but he also makes us accept that our position as a child of God is not merited in any way, but it's solely according to God's grace.

Because the promise we have in adoption is that when we come to God, like the prodigal came to his father, God says to us, I want you to come home with me.

I want you to be my son and my daughter. I want you to live under my roof and share my table and bear my name and be heir to all that I have.

All that I have is yours. And you know, the apostle Paul, he spoke about this wonderful position of adoption in Romans 8.

[34 : 54] Because he described the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a believer. And he said, if the Spirit who has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, if he dwells in you, then you have received the Spirit of adoption, by whom you are able to cry, Abba, Father.

But more than that, says Paul, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs.

heirs of God, a joint heirs with Christ. Oh, my friend, our adoption, it secures a position in the family of God, and we have a right to all the privileges as the children of God.

And is it any wonder to us that the apostle John, when he considered how deep the Father's love for us really is, he could say, behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we, prodigal sinners, that we should be called the children of God.

And you know, my friend, by the time the Pharisees had finished listening to Jesus, they were angry. They were angry that the Father would love the prodigal the way he did.

[36 : 22] But by the time the sinners had finished listening to Jesus, they were left without doubt that Jesus told the parable just for them.

And my unconverted friend, Jesus has told this parable just for you. And so for one last time, Jesus wants to ask us, who do you see in the parable?

Do you see a description of others, or do you see a description of yourself? Do you see that you're a prodigal sinner who is being welcomed into the loving arms of the heavenly Father?

Father? If you do, then arise and go to your Father. May the Lord bless these thoughts.

Let us pray. Gracious God and loving heavenly Father, we thank thee, O Lord, for the wonder of the gospel, that it is a gospel which receives sinners.

[37 : 39] it is a gospel that transforms us from a sinner to a son or a daughter. And Lord, we pray that we would lay hold of these things, that we would see them as things that apply to us, that we are those who are being spoken of by Jesus, and that Jesus is speaking to us.

Help us, Lord, to hear, and help us to respond. Bless us, Lord, in the week that lies ahead. Watch over us, we pray. Undertake for us in all that we say and do, and all that we go through in life's journey, that we would commit everything to thee, knowing, O Lord, that thou art the one who upholds us by thine own righteous right hand.

Do us good then, we pray, and go before us, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We shall conclude by singing in Psalm 103.

Psalm 103 from the Scottish Psalter, page 369, singing from verse 8 down to the verse marked 13.

Psalm 103 from verse 8. The Lord our God is merciful, and he is gracious, long suffering and slow to wrath, in mercy plenteous.

[39 : 05] Down to the verse marked 13. Such pity as a father have, and to his children dear, like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear.

These verses to God's praise. The Lord our God is merciful, and he is gracious, long suffering and slow to wrath, in mercy plenteous.

He will not chide for death body, nor keep his anger still.

With us he held not as we sinned, nor we quite a room.

For us the heaven in its height the earth surmounted by, death as them as our mountain is guaranteed the west so far our key from us remove it in his love all our iniquity

[41 : 23] Archbishop the father hath unto his children dear like pity shows the Lord to such as worship in fear the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore Amen