

The Loving Father

Luke 15:17-24

November 14, 2021

I invite you to return to Luke 15, as we continue studying the parable of the prodigal son and today we come to the central character in the story, who is the loving father and we're going to see his remarkable kindness shown to an undeserving prodigal.

We left the prodigal last time in some pretty dire circumstances. He was near starvation, in a pigsty, fine Jewish boy, but brought to that state, that condition in the fact that he had squandered his wealth and then an unforeseen natural disaster of a famine, sent him scrounging for food and tying himself to a man, a citizen of the land, a Gentile who had really no use for him and sent him into the pigsty to feed his pigs. Pigs were more valuable to him than the prodigal was.

So, he's in some dire circumstances, and the fact that he's near starvation, that's really not the worst of his problems.

Like all sinners, including the prodigal, the setting and the scenery may change, but the unregenerate heart that drives all the action, that's the problem. We can see that from the very start in the prodigal, that his situation was dire from the start. Where he ends up is just the consequence of what his heart is driving at, what his heart longs for. We see it if you back up to verse 11. Jesus tells us as he starts the story. "There was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to the father, 'Father, give me the share of property that's coming to me' and he," the father, "divided his property between them."

So, that's the younger son and we talked last week about how shameful and brazen his pride and his self-centeredness is that he would basically say to his father, I wish you were dead now so I can have the inheritance cash out and leave this place.

So, he's in bad bad shape, spiritually speaking, that brazen request reveals a self-centered pride and insatiable greed. He's got a covetous heart that really knows no restraint. He's got no thought of honor, no sense of propriety, no appreciation or gratitude for his father at all. He's grown up

in his father's home. He's been deeply loved. He's been well cared for, provided for ever since the cradle. He's been taken care of abundantly, the prodigal's thoughts in all that care and provision, they actually turn dark. They're poisoned by ingratitude. As every heart is poisoned by ingratitude. He's stirred up by greed. He starts making plans for an escape and his escape is going to come through patricide and larceny, a bloodless murder of his father, and really outright robbery.

So, ironically though it's not the father who died that day. He's still very much alive. The son was dead even while he lived. And it wasn't the father who lost his wealth. True wealth has nothing to do with money whatsoever. The son didn't understand that at all, even with one third of the large estate in his pocket, he left home in poverty. It didn't take long for his physical condition to match his spiritual condition.

So, look at verse 13. We see that, "Not many days later the younger son gathered all that he had." That is to say, he cashed everything out in a hurry "and he took a long journey into a faraway country. And there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe

famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. And so, he went and hired himself to, out to one of the citizens of that country, sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything."

So, whatever the citizen of this far off country was paying him, it was not enough to sustain him and since no one gave him anything, we can understand that because they're all struggling to survive through a famine as well. But we see there's no wages for him. There's no charity coming to him, so he's facing a future of slow death by starvation, and it's at this point, Jesus tells us in verse 17, "the young man came to himself."

There's a contrast here as he comes to himself, a contrast that forms in his mind between the stinginess of the citizen that he's working for, and the generosity of his father. Between the paucity and the scarcity in that land that he's in and the abundance of his home, he says, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread?" A surplus of bread because of what my father pays them. "But I perish here with hunger."

That's not the first hint in the story that the son is beginning to, or I should say that is the first hint in the story that the son is beginning to notice his father's character. In verse 12 it's clear the son took his father for granted. He had no appreciation for how hard his father had worked, how kind his father had been, how patient his father was in this painful task of dividing the property between the two sons.

But now here we see that the prodigal begins to realize how good he had it, how good life was in his father's house, how he lacked for nothing. My friend as you listen this morning, and my fellow Christian, my prayer for you today is that you take a good hard look at your heart. See if there's any ingratitude in you. Think about how you have, we all have, by the way, think about you, how you've taken God for granted. How you've spurned his goodness.

Think about how you've grumbled and complained. Think about your sometimes critical spirit. Think about how you've complained when you ought to be really doing nothing but

rejoicing, nothing but giving thanks. Think about living for yourself when you ought to be bowing down in worship and using your life as a stewardship to obey Jesus Christ.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 2, verse 4, asking the reader, us, "Do you presume on the riches of God's kindness? Have you ignored and spurned his forbearance and his patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" So, what about you? What about us?

So, my hope and prayer is that you will see the love of God today in the character of the father. That God will open your eyes to discern his goodness and his kindness, and his immeasurable patience with you, with us, with sinners. So that in seeing his love you'll come to him repenting of your sins, trusting him completely because he's given us nothing but reasons to trust him. That you'll find salvation, you'll find forgiveness of your sins, and you'll give your heart to Jesus Christ. That's my hope for you today.

The story starts for us today, as we've seen with an ungrateful, unrepentant son, and even though his life has hit rock bottom, he's got one more effort at self, self-salvation to attempt that we see today. So, here's our first point for this morning .

Number one, the son's fictitious contrition. The son's fictitious contrition, it was a false humility. A false contrition was all part of a plan. It says here, "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 then this in verse 20, "And he arose, came to his father."

There are many people who, including a vast majority, I think of commentators, many who believe that there is true repentance found here at this point in the prodigal. That true repentance is working in his heart, that that's happening right, right now, and it is understandable because the language of

repentance is here. There is some language of repentance, but Jesus is very careful to show us that the son is not repentant at this point. Not yet anyway.

Repentance language may be here. What we're lacking is the heart of repentance. What we're lacking is true contrition, humility. Notice how Jesus shows us in the prodigal's little soliloquy here, his speech with himself, shows us in the thoughts of his heart that the son is really concerned about his stomach and not his soul. How many unbelievers, ourselves included, we're always concerned about our stomach and not our soul. That's the prodigal here, he's saying I'm hungry, I'll die if I don't eat, so, here's what I'm going to do and then he executes.

Jesus is showing the young man's motivations. He's telling us here what the man, what this guy's thinking, not so much to show us, and really, it's not from Jesus' point in telling the story, it's not so much just to show us a false form of repentance to help us grow in discernment. Though that is happening here, if we'll pay attention, but it's so that we can understand that, that repentance is not something that's self-



generated. Repentance is not something that he musters up from himself and does on his own initiative. Repentance, like every virtue, is a gift of God. Repentance does not come from ourselves; it comes from God as a gift. It is his kindness to us.

So, what sounds like humility, what sounds like contrition we can see from the young man's reasoning, which Jesus is telling the story and he wants us to see it, so he shows it to us, this is about filling an empty stomach. This is flesh driven, not spiritually driven. This is the works of the flesh that masquerades as remorse and repentance to take care of what they think is a fleshly problem.

A bit of cultural background that'll help us to see the point a bit more clearly. We said last time that the son's shame, his treatment of his father, his rejection of his family, his pining for a foreign land to live as he pleased, this became known outside the family, became known to the whole village, to the whole town. Even before he liquidated his one third share of the estate according to verse 13, word had gotten around about what he had done the way he treated his father with contempt all

throughout the village. And the son's shameful behavior did not go well, down well with the, with the, with the neighbors, those who held the father in high esteem, those who conducted business with the father. He had brought shame on this family. Shame on a good man. He treated his father with contempt.

And so, his reputation in the community is dirt and it's lower than dirt. A pigsty is exactly where he belongs. His deplorable actions would have ignited the village's anger. Its sense of, of indignation, righteous indignation because he had shamed his father. He'd shamed his family. He, he despised his family name, and if he hadn't left in such a hurry, they would have driven him out anyway. They have tarred and feathered him and rode him out of town on a rail.

So, for the crowd listening to the story, hearing Jesus tell this tale, that's exactly how they felt. That's exactly the emotion that it would have excited within them. This indignation for the son. Even though no one wants to see a, a good Jewish boy be wasted like that and end up in the mud with swine, everybody would have seen this as a fitting consequence of his appallingly shameful, utterly disgraceful behavior.

For the characters in the story, including the prodigal, the elements of shame and honor are in the background, the cultural background of this, any Middle Eastern setting. The young man, as he sat in that pigsty as he's thinking about what to do next, he knows his reputation is so terribly damaged, probably permanently, probably beyond repair, and this is why, when the famine hit after he had squandered his money on extravagant living and he began to be in need, this is why he would not dare go back home.

He was hoping to get, to hold out long enough. He was hoping to outlast the famine, make his own way in the world, recover what he'd lost. He's hoping to rebuild the wealth far away from the family, hopefully without their knowledge. Far from that dusty village and to go home now after squandering his father's estate, off in a Gentile country; there's no living that down.

In fact, the unstated background of the story here, unknown to us but very well known to the audience of the 1st century, is what's called a *kezazah* ceremony. The noun is *kezazah*, and the

Hebrew verb is *kezaz*. And the Hebrew verb *kezaz* means to cut off or to cut up in pieces. So, the *kezazah* ceremony, it was practiced in these Jewish villages, every once in a while, when there was some type of despicable act that brought shame to the family in the village. So, there's this ceremony, a symbolic act of severing social connection for some disreputable act, some shameful deed. It was basically a ban and driving this person this individual, away from the community. It's excommunication.

According to Doctor Kenneth Bailey, whose book on this is just phenomenal on the Luke 15, he says "The *kezazah* ceremony was performed for one of two reasons. If a young man, number one if a young man married an immoral woman" that was grounds. Or "Number two if he had lost his family's inheritance among the Gentiles," which is exactly what the prodigal had done. His shame was so great, his behavior so disgraceful it warranted his excommunication. A lifetime ban from returning to the village.

So, for those listening to Jesus when they heard about the loss of money and the famine in a foreign land in the Gentile country. When the prodigal chose not to return to the village and hire himself out instead, they knew why they understood.

He's going to face a *kezazah* ceremony if he returns. Of course he's not coming back. The villagers in that ceremony would carry the young man into the village square in public and surround him. They'd take a large earthenware pot, like a large jug that would hold water emptied out of the water and fill that large pot with burned stuff like nuts and fruit and grain, and the entire village, gather around, surround the young man and they would investigate and prosecute and unpack the cause of this ceremony.

And then they would break the earthenware pot in front of him, spilling all of its contents on the ground and cry out, "This man is cut off." His hidden shame would become a public shame. His private disgrace would become exposed as the village passed sentence and he's banished. He'd be unable to survive there if he tried to camp, come back and hang out in the town area. According to Bailey, again, he says, "No one's going to feed him or give him a drink or give him shelter or hire him or have anything to do with him. He's got to leave town if the *kezazah* ceremony is enacted."

So, returning to our story, that's the background. This is what is factoring into the young man's reasoning. As I said, our prodigal, he may sound repentant here at this point to our ears. But Judas, Jesus' audience knew what was up here. They knew exactly why he wasn't going to return home, why that was so unlikely.

Because of their cultural awareness, they knew what was motivating him. They could see his false humility, but even for us, who are separated by two millennia, by cultural, language differences and all the rest, for us, Jesus has given the motivation right up front. If we just pay attention to the language here, we see through it as well. He is hungry and that's what he wants to fix. That's the problem.

When we read in verse 17, "He came to himself." That's, that's not shorthand for repentance at this point. That's simply verbalizing through his soliloquy, his internal thoughts, and it's actually quite common to get into the mind of some of the characters in Luke's Gospel. Back in Luke 7:39, remember the judgmental Pharisee at that meal? He speaks, he speaks to himself, but he's criticizing Jesus because he doesn't know what

kind of woman who this is who's touching him, and if he were a prophet, he'd know that. Thinking to himself. Luke records that.

He also records Luke 12:17, as Jesus shows in the story, there of the rich man, he's showing him musing internally about what to do with a surplus of crops. "I know what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger barns and I'll eat and drink and be merry and relax."

So, Jesus is filling us in, Luke is filling us in. We see in the next chapter, Luke 16:3, the shrewd manner, manager, he reasons to himself. We see the same thing in Luke 18:4, of the unrighteous judge, who's also talking to himself, and he's thinking about how to get rid of a persistent widow. Every time we're brought into the, into the inner workings and the mind of, of people in the Gospel of Luke, we're seeing unrighteous thinking and we need to understand that, because from the surface it can look so good on the surface. What does God tell Samuel, "Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." This is the fact. It's not rebuking us because we don't see the heart. We can't see the heart. All we have is what's on the outward appearance. It's how we have to make our

judgments is on the outward appearance. But the God who sees the heart exposes the heart and shows us what's going on.

So, when the young man came to himself, he was saying this, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread." Hired servants there is the word *misthios*, the root, root word *misthos*. It means wage, it means reward or compensation. So, this is a wage earner. You can see like in verse 22 by contrast, the slaves that are referred to there in verse 22 they are the *dou*, the *doulos*, the *doulos* is the singular. So, the slaves are those who are owned by another. So, owned by the father, they're cared for as a part of the household. The *misthios*, they're not like that, they are not part of the household. They are freed men, and they are wage earners.

So, they could be day, day laborers without much skill. They could also be skilled tradesman. Very highly skilled tradesman, in fact. Even doctors, lawyers, those kind, they were wage earners as well. But they were free, they were independent and of the household, and they could hire themselves out for compensation.



Depending on the kind of work or the level of skill in their service, wages could be paid out daily, monthly, even annually. Large estates like the father's estate in this story he could afford to hire skilled medical workers doctors. It gets, well afford to hire, hire legal help, lawyers, professional skilled workers. The father also would hire day laborers. He would hire unskilled workers to get extra help during times of harvest when, when he had more than enough work for even his household.

According to Leviticus 19:13, those kinds of workers were to be paid at the end of every single day because that's what they depended on. They had to have that money. So, they go home buy on the way home eat, feed their family or take the money or the food home and feed their families.

So, this is what informs the prodigal's plan, verse 18, "I will arise go to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven, and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

So, he's thinking if he can sneak through the village, avoid getting caught if he can avoid that dreaded *kezazah* ceremony, he can get to his father, first maybe he'll have the chance to recite this little speech. It consists of three things; I've sinned, I'm not worthy, make me as a hired worker.

First, "I've sinned against heaven, and before you." Again, that sounds really good, right? We want to believe him until you realize that's exactly what Pharaoh said to Moses. Over and over in Exodus 10:16 after the eighth plague, the locusts had ravaged the land of Egypt, and he says, "Moses, Moses I've sinned against the Lord Your God." And he even uses the divine name, "Yahweh your God, and against you Moses." Oh, he's so contrite. Isn't he? Gentle Pharaoh, he's just been misled. Within a few verses his heart is hard again, he disobeys the Lord. He sins again. He refuses to let Israel go. So, we see it's a false contrition.

King Saul, he said the same thing to, to David, or to Samuel I should say in 1 Samuel 15:24 he says, "I've sinned or

I've transgressed the command, commandment of the Lord and your words." Saul said similar things to David. Things that sounded humble and contrite, but then he kept trying to hunt David down and kill him. Tried to pin him to the wall with a spear. Went after him with his army. False contrition.

Sinners can sound contrite. I know that when I was, before I was saved, well, even times I was saved, I would say words that really sounded contrite, but man, I was hiding a bad motive, wasn't I? But sinners can sound so contrite when plagues are ravaging the land, when the world is falling apart, when things are beyond their control. Are they sincere when they say this? Probably, as sincere as sinners can be at the time, but something, in order for there to be true contrition, something has to change, and it has to change deep within for humility to be genuine. Something profoundly different in order for contrition to be real and for remorse to lead to true repentance.

Second thing he says, "I'm no longer worthy to be called your son." Again, that's true, but it doesn't go deep enough. It's not for the right reasons, because at this point, and in

light of the next statement in his homecoming speech, the son thinks his unworthiness consists in losing the money. He sees his error but his demise, in his mind is weather related. I would have been fine if that famine hadn't hit. Things were really starting to workout for me. All those friends I bought with, well, all those lavish gifts I gave I was just about to reap a great harvest of reward for all that extravagant generosity. I just need to, just need to get back on track. Just get back on track, last this famine, see it through and now that that hasn't happened, I got another plan, I got another plan.

There's no thought in his mind at this point, but the nature of his sin against heaven, what it is. No thought in his mind how deeply unworthy he truly is, and that becomes abundantly clear.

Thirdly, when he suggests a solution, he says, "treat me as one of your hired servants." Actually, that's the ESV. Treat me, make me is what it says. It's the verb *poieō*, make me, do this for me. JB Phillips, in his translation, renders it this way. "Please take me on as one of your hired men." That's a good translation.

Interesting, isn't it that his solution still, at this point, still protects his independence from his father? He's no longer worthy to be considered a son. Yeah, we get that. What about becoming his father's slave? Would that do? Slaves were treated as sons. I mean they were treated as part of the household. They're counted as part of the household. A father is responsible to care for the slaves. They didn't have the rights and privileges of sonship, but he's already acknowledged. I'm not worthy of that.

So, what's keeping him from entering into slavery with his father? Be cared for, provided for, enjoy the provision and protection of that home, have the family name cover him again. The prodigal doesn't want that. He still wants his freedom. He still wants his independence from his father. He doesn't see the nature of his sin. He doesn't see the true unworthiness as sin against his father. Sin against the family name. The despicable way that he really, he honor, dishonored his father and his mother. And then he's got in the back of his head, he's got that *kezazah* ceremony, which is not in the back of his head anymore, now it's coming to the front of his mind. He thinks his sin,

consistent losing the money in a Gentile country, his dishonor is unworthiness, is about financial mismanagement.

And so, to rectify the situation, he plans to overcome the disgrace with good old fashioned hard work. Make me as one of your hired men. I'll, I'll apprentice with someone. I will learn a profitable skill and trade. Take my journeyman's test, take my master's test. Eventually in time I'll pay, I'll provide for myself, I'll earn an income, but I'll pay you back. I'll dig myself out of this hole by working hard. I'll restore my reputation by earning it.

Um, no, he won't. This kid has no chance at all of paying back his father. No chance of paying back his debt. That's way too much, especially, and that's too big of a burden for his tiny little character to carry. Because remember his heart hasn't changed. He's no different, he's just moved locations. He's the same person. He found himself in a pig sty, the same person that murdered his father, the same person that took all the estate. Nothing's changing. But everybody listening is saying, yeah, this is what he should do." This is always the way with the

sinner. Thinking he can do it on his own, thinking he or she can get to heaven by merit.

The prodigal sees no need for grace at this point. For him, it's simple, just go get a job, feed myself, pay back what I've lost, restore my honor, restore the honor to the family. The only obstacle is that pesky *kezazah* ceremony. Banishment is going to really throw a wrench into my plan.

So, if he can get his dad to sign off on his deal he's got a chance here. So, if he's going to pull off the plan, if he's going to succeed on the road to self-restoration, he needs to find his father first. He needs to get in there, find his father, secure his blessing in order to avoid the banishment, the excommunication, and that can give him a chance, by a little time to find a trade, maybe in another village, hire on there, become an apprentice, make a living, pay his debts, recover financially, and restore his reputation.

So, verse 20, "He rose and came to his father." Makes the long trek back to the village from which he, by the way, had

longed to escape in the first place. We can imagine as he's walking, and the closer he gets, we can imagine the tension that he feels knowing what's gonna happen if he gets caught by one of the villagers, the hunger, and then that growing anxiety had to combine to severely weaken his condition. He's half starved, he's dirty, stinking of pig, he's frightened by the prospect of discovery. So obvious, isn't it? The kid did not know what he needed. He's lost. He is clueless. The father knew though. The father knew exactly what he needed.

Second point, starting in verse 20, point number two, the father's judicious compassion. The father's judicious compassion. Says in verse 20, "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." Really is an absolutely shocking scene. The phrase "still a long way off." It's the same word used back in verse 13 the word *makros*. When he took a journey into a *makros* country, a faraway country.

The connection here between verse 13 and verse 20, is meant to emphasize distance. The younger son left home so he could live a long way off, great distance, and even though he's come



back, he's still a long way off. He may be coming geographically, but still, he's still far away relationally. He's still estranged from his father, his family, his village. He's still a long way from humility. Still a long way from true repentance.

So, the father takes the initiative here, he goes out there to get him and he needs to get there right away. The son is not the only one, by the way, mindful of this *kezazah* ceremony. First, it says, "The father saw him." And what does that mean if he saw him at a long distance, it means he's been looking for him, hasn't he. We can even imagine here, picture the father going out on the porch and as he watched him leave home. His, his tear-filled eyes never turned away from his son as all he sees is his back as he's leaving and walking away. Until his son's faint silhouette disappears over the horizon, and you can see him no longer. Ever since his departure, the father is scanning that horizon daily. His aging eyes are aching and straining to see, he's eager to see his son traveling back home again. And on this day, he finally spots him while he is still a long way off.

Secondly, his father felt compassion for his son. His compassion is what compels the rest of his actions. This is the characteristic of God the Father that we're supposed to see in spotlight here. How compassionate he is, his love driving everything. The verb for compassion, showing compassion, it, it sounds strange to our ears. It's *splagchnizomai*. It's from the word *splagchna* and *splagchna* refers to the inward parts.

So, your *splagchna*, those are your guts. That was, I know that was a very polite way to put it, sorry. But, for the Jews, the guts, the abdomen was the seat of the emotions, that's where they felt things, that's where the emotions, the affections were, and that actually makes sense to us, doesn't it?

We feel our emotions, when you're negatively emotive, you feel it in your abdomen, positive as well, down in our guts we have a visceral sensation that we notice. When something bad happens, we even say, I was gutted or I was sick about that. Positively, I feel giddy inside or perhaps, I was tickled or, even worse, I was tickled to death. We feel it. The father's compassion, it's always there, it's been there from the very beginning as the son left and now as the son returns home, his

compassion is there and his compassion is ignited on seeing his son again. It's fanned into a flame. It's compassion that kept his eyes on the horizon and its compassion that in his son's absence formulated a plan. Knowing exactly what he would do if he saw his son again. If he ever saw his son making his way toward the village, his compassion had already planned exactly what he's going to do.

Brings us to his third action. It says, "The father ran and embraced him." It sounds like two separate actions. It is two separate verbs, but one is a participle modifying the verb so literally it's "having run, he fell upon his neck." That's the literal expression. It's combined in the Greek. It's spoken of as a single action, running and falling. The word *trechō*, the father ran, that's the word that Paul uses for running a race in 1 Corinthians 9:24 and 26. And to win the prize, Paul says there, there's no Laurel wreath for light jogging or fast walking or wogging or whatever it's called. This is not leisurely. This is a dead Sprint. It's like a footrace in the stadium.

So, this is picturing the father running like that, running like he's running a race in a stadium; only at his age he's running through the village no less. This is going to get people's attention. I know as I get older, I'm kind of self-conscious about doing physically exerting things in front of other people. Knowing how ridiculous I'm starting to look, you know, and how I'm losing my balance and I'm shaking with weights and all that kind of stuff.

When I was a young man, I had no thought of that. Just bound and sprint and lift and prance around like young men do in our strength. That run, that starts to run out, doesn't it? The older you get. Brings a good dose of humility that we should have as young men, but we don't. Shocking behavior though for a man not of just of his age, but of his stature.

Years ago, I spent some time in the Middle East and I had occasion now and then to observe some of these Sheikhs, these wealthy Arabs. They're oil tycoons and they're dressed in these glistening white thawbs, they're the long ankle length tunic. Comes from here goes all the way down to their feet and they're brilliantly white. They sipped Turkish coffee in hotels and

smoked and leisurely kept an eye on oil prices and passed the day watching their, their stock prices and wealth prices increase.

I can tell you I never saw, and I watched them for quite a while, I never saw those men run anywhere. They're never in a hurry. They're, they never appear anxious about anything. They're always perfectly composed. They exude this quiet confidence in self-control and poise. It's very nonwestern. I don't think any of them have a Twitter account by the way, just saying. But it's very refreshing to see older men take seriously the need to show a dignity that benefits their elevated status. That's the Oriental mind, the trait of propriety of a personal decorum.

Again, Doctor Bailey writes this. He says, "It's safe to assume the father has not run anywhere for any purpose for 40 years. No villager over the age of 25 ever runs. But now the father races down the road. To do so, he must take the edge, the front edge of his robes in his hand like a teenager and when he does this, his legs show in what is considered a humiliating posture." All of this is painfully shameful for him. But why

does he run? Why does he endure this ignominy? This this shame this personal humiliation.

Two reasons, obviously he misses his son, but it's really that he must get to him quickly before the other villagers do. He knows what's in store. He knows how quickly excited people, how quickly a mob can form. He knows how quickly they can organize a *kezazah*. They can, they can rally in the entire village, and they can surround this boy. So, the father has to get there before anybody else does.

So, he sets aside his dignity, he pulls up his robe, he exposes his legs in public as he runs toward his, this is totally disgraceful for a man of his age and stature, but he sprints to get there to his son before they do. It is his compassion that drives him on, it is his compassion that moves those old legs past the point of creaking and into the point of burning pain. On the sight of this older respected man in the community who is shaming himself like this in public, as the villagers are watching, they're going to go where he's going. What in the world could cause a man to run like that?

So, they follow him. He's being followed also by an entourage of his household slaves. They're trying to keep up with the old man. They're wondering what's going on. They hope he doesn't have a heart attack on the way, but this is going to draw attention. So, the village drops whatever they're doing. All of them are now running after the father.

Now, flip it around and put yourself in the position of the prodigal. You see, this swarm of people coming at you? What are you thinking? Well, it's over. It is over. The *kezazah* is next. I'm going to be arrested, be dragged into the public square, interrogated, shamed, humiliated. I'll be officially banned. He's traveled a long, long distance at this point, he's on an empty stomach. He's got no energy to fight, no energy to run. He's helpless. He's at their mercy.

And as they get close enough, now he recognizes something even more terrible, troubling, horrific to him. He sees his father at the head of the pack and he's running and he's throwing caution and dignity to the wind. That can only mean one

thing, that the father is raging with anger, that he's infuriated and the son knows he's about to be dragged into the public square for trial, this *kezazah*, and he's going to be dragged by his father. He's resigned himself. It's over.

Then the unexpected happens. Something utterly completely startling, astonishing, the father falls on his neck and throws his arms around his son and then this fourth action in the sequence, the father kisses him.

Yes, I know the Arabs and the Middle Easterners, they like to kiss, makes us Westerner people like me, feel quite uncomfortable. I even have a hard time with Ryan's hugs still. I'm getting used to it, getting better. Just working on it, but I gotta work on it. But this is not just the Middle Eastern embrace and kiss. The word is strengthened, a strengthened form of the word kiss. So, it means to kiss fervently or kiss affectionately. His father has been waiting. He's been watching and now the compassion that has energized this sprint, that compelled the embrace of his son, ignoring the dirt and the grime and the smell. He didn't even notice that he pushes past



it, it focuses our attention on a tender demonstration of love and affection, in a kiss.

The son is absolutely bewildered at this point. He fully expected, he knows he deserves to be dragged by the hair into the public square, prosecuted by the village for the dishonor that he's shown to his father and to his family and what does he get instead? There's no mistaking his father, though sorely offended, he shows love, not hate. He hugs him; he doesn't strike him. He kisses with affection; he doesn't pummel him with blows of condemnation. He treats him with a mercy that he does not deserve, instead of demanding the justice which he does deserve. What is this?

The son isn't the only one bewildered here. Jesus' audience listening to this story. Especially the Pharisees and scribes. They're, they are more than perplexed by this behavior. They're shocked at Jesus' story, the turn that it's taken here. A respected Jewish father, indulging his son's treachery this way. Are you kidding me? They're angered by this. They feel betrayed by, by Jesus by the storyteller. How dare you pull me in like this and then bait and switch me. They were tracking, with

Jesus, agreeing with him up to this point. Shameful son getting what he deserves as he makes plans to rectify his great shame. He's going to face some serious obstacles carrying out his plan. Coming back home puts him at risk of the tar and feather ceremony, at risk of the father's wrath.

The only question in their minds at this point or coming up to this is will the kid make it to his father? Will he pull it off, or not? Is he going to be able to hire on as a laborer, recover some shred of respect, or is the village going to find him first? They kind of hope for the latter. Prosecute his case, banish him, either outcome is fine with them, it's a good story.

But not this, not, not this scandal. This is an absolute outrage. This is a set up by Jesus. They've been set up. It's exactly, exactly the reaction Jesus wanted to provoke. It's exactly what he wanted these Pharisees and scribes and the entire crowd, frankly, to feel. Jesus, according to verse 2, is being charged with the offence of receiving sinners and eating with them. That was a social disgrace. He's being charged by them and trying to have his reputation ruined because of the

social, cultural, religious offense of the indignity of association with vile, reprehensible sinners.

Back to the father. You see, he's dropped all dignity because of his compassion. He runs to the boy. He embraces him, he kisses him, and the only one not astounded in the story is the father. The only one not astounded on the outside of the story hearing this, is Jesus, the one telling the story. The prodigal, once he recovers from his shock, he starts to stammer out the speech that he's rehearsed. He uses the prepared words that he had formed, but notice there's an alteration in verse 21, reveals a profound change of heart. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son,'" and third thing. Well, that's it. Right? He drops the last line. There's no plan anymore. There's no plan "make me like one of your hired servants." Seems he prepared that part, it was like an entire lifetime ago, that was prepared actually by another person.

But now in light of the father's grace, in the face of his father humiliating himself and sacrificing his dignity to intervene on his behalf, in light of his father's love, in the

face of this very public display of affection, how could he speak of earning anything? What does this mean? What are we seeing here? In an instant, in the immediacy of a hidden moment, this prodigal has been changed. This young man's heart is different and radically, deeply so.

He has been converted by the father's compassion and love and by his amazing Grace. And now when he uses the word father, for the first time in his life, he knows the depth of the meaning of that term of filial affection. He knows the privilege that's his to be called a son, and the privilege has nothing to do with money, which is such a trivial thing. The true privilege is the joy of a relationship with the father.

All of his troubles are over, but not because of finances. All the shame is erased, not because he earned it. Everything is changed on the sole singular basis of his father's love. Now when he says, "I have sinned against heaven and before you," he can see clearly how he has sinned against heaven, which is a, a veiled way of speaking of God himself. He has. He's sinned against God, and it's the God who has condemned all those who

dishonor father and mother. He's sinned against the God who condemns those who treat parents with shame and offense.

Now for the first time he sees, and he's mortified over it. His disgraceful behavior, his actions that are so starkly in contrast with his father's obvious love. Now when he says, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." He has no thought here of proposing any kind of superficial fix to pay his way to merit approval.

The son has finally come home. He is at rest now in his father's loving arms. He is ready to accept whatever his father decides. He's putting his future in the hands of this incredibly gracious man whom he's never known. His future, everything from here on, is the privilege of getting to know the father that he had never known before.

I know it's not lost on you that the father in Jesus' story, father represents God. But to be more precise, we should say that it's the father in the home that represents God. We're starting to see that the father who leaves the home and goes out

in disgrace and shame when he leaves his dignity behind, when he's willing to humble himself in the eyes of others, when he's willing to go out in public in the form of a servant pulling up his robe and running and burying his shame. Well, the father leaving the home, this is the picture of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has masterfully here turned the spotlight on himself. The son of God in regal, royal, heavenly splendor, it says in Philippians 2:6, "Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself. He lacked, took the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. Even the death on the cross." This story portrays God in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:19 as Paul tells us, "That in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." His humiliation, for our salvation, that's what this is; his pain for our gain, his cross for our crown.

And then it goes further than that as we come to a third and final point, number three, the father's prodigious

restoration, the father's prodigious restoration. You know, a word is related to the word prodigious, it's the word prodigal. The father here acts like a prodigal in the restoration of his son. In verses 22 to 23 we see a prodigious extravagant restoration of the son, pulling out all the stops. The father says verse 22 to his servants, "bring quickly the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." Do it quickly, do it now, and "then bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let us eat and celebrate. For this, my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."

They began to celebrate. The son is standing there hearing all this. I mean, he's just overcoming the shock of the affection in the touch of his father and it's not a hostile touch, it's a loving, affectionate touch, a hug, a kiss and he's baffled. Now he's basking in the love of his father; his father, who's taken the initiative. He continues to work proactively to affirm his son and notice he does so in public, before all the gathered villagers, before his own slaves. He says, "This is my beloved son," I accept him. By affirming his son publicly like this, the father is effectively spoiled the plans of anyone who was thinking about a *kezazah* ceremony. By his public displays of

affection, he has quite literally saved his son. By his public affirmation, he now preserves his son permanently. There will be no casting out. There will be no severing of ties. There will be no cutting off, turning away, throwing pots before him and all the rest. The father has received him, he has forgiven him, and he doesn't stop there. The father won't rest until there is full restoration.

He commands all the tokens of sonship be placed on his son, and to be done so immediately without any delay. The best robe, literally it's the robe, the first one, the robe, the first one. The first of the long stately robe the father himself wore. He wore it three times a year at the Feast of Israel. This is a robe of honor. It's one that symbolized the, the, the, the honor of the family. The name of the family, he wore it himself. He says put it on him. The ring on his hand, that refers to the signet ring with the family seal on it. So that means it gives him full authority, legal authority. It gives him the, the power to bind the family contractually. It gave him purchasing authority to use estate resources, to spend treasure. Gone is any thought of the old part that's got the estate that he wasted and squandered is gone.



Again, let me just remind you this isn't parenting advice. This isn't what to do with your son when he blows everything, and now, just lavish him with more, just give him more. That's not what it's saying. The story is told for another point. Okay, little footnote all right, back to the story. The shoes on his feet, literally sandals. Slaves went barefoot in the house. Even house guests who are invited over, they remove sandals upon arrival. But the master of the house and his sons, they wore sandals in the house, distinguishing them for the rest, from the rest of the people. Since the father's servants are commanded to attend to these things immediately. They hurry off to the house to get those items as the son and his father are making their way, they run ahead and commence getting those items, commence preparations for the feast.

Meanwhile, father and son walking together. They're going at a leisurely pace. They're enjoying rich fellowship here. They're indulging themselves in a conversation they've never been able to have, able to have before. When the servants return with the robe, the ring, the sandals, the son is outfitted right away according to the father's wishes. He's covered in public,

according to the father's command. The servants hurried back home again to get, continue getting ready for the great banquet that the father's just commanded.

According to verse 23, beef is on the menu. They will be preparing something even better, Rufus, wherever you are, even better than USDA certified grade A prime beef. Even better, the word fattened is a *situition* from the word *siteutos*. *Siteutos* means grain, so this is grain fed and it is a fatted calf. It's not the full-grown steer. This is grain fed veal.

Slaughtered anywhere from 6 to 8 months. It's succulent, it's tender. Perfect meal for a perfect occasion. In addition to butchering preparing the veal for the feast, they're preparing side dishes as well. They're uncorking the wine. They're enlisting musicians, singers, entertainers. They're sending out invitations to villagers. They're inviting them to the party as well, and the village will gather, but not for the public shame of the *kezazah* this time, they will gather to celebrate, not the son, but the father. They are gathering to honor the father to celebrate him for his mercy.

So much to do, so little time. Why this extravagance? Why has the father turned prodigal on us? That's what the word means. Prodigal means extravagant, because verse 24, he tells us, something miraculous has happened here. "This, my son, was dead and is alive again. He was lost and he's found."

Is the prodigal responsible for this turn around? Is he the one being celebrated here? Remember what we saw in verse 20. The father saw him when? It was when he was still a long way off. He was still wandering. He's still thinking he can work his way back, pay his own way. He was as lost then as he was the day he left.

It is the father in his compassion, who has put an end to the wandering. He's the one who prevented the *kezazah* ceremony. He's the one who saved his son's life. It's the father, not the son. It's the father who is responsible for the son being alive, for the son, being found for his current condition that just safe and sound and, and live, as alive as never before. Like the lost sheep on his own, the son was as good as dead, like the

lost coin fallen through the cracks in a foreign land, the son was gone forever. But now he is alive. He's brought back from the dead. Now he's found he's never to be lost again and it is all because of the father.

Returning to the house, the son's filthy rags are burned in the fire never to be seen again. The son will be bathed, groomed, readied for the feast. He dons the robe again, slips the ring on his finger, the sandals on his feet, he is now totally restored to the place of a true son. He's not just a son by blood relation, now he's a son indeed. He is a son by true conversion; he is a son by genuine affection.

So, they begin to celebrate. Why wouldn't they? Not celebrating the son per se. Friends of the shepherd didn't come over to celebrate the sheep. The woman's friends didn't come to celebrate the coin and OO and Ah, over its shininess. The celebration is for the shepherd, it's for the woman, and it is for the father. They are there to show respect. They're there to show honor to the father. They're able, they're there to show and celebrate his saving work. They're there to glorify him for rescuing his son from certain death, for finding his lost son,

for saving him from public shame, and humiliation, and banishment. They're there to celebrate him restoring the son to full sonship. All of that magnifies the work of the father. Any joy that the villagers have over the son, any joy that the household servants have over the son, they have had to wrestle through and overcome deep feelings of anger and indignation and resentment over the son's shameful actions.

If they're going to celebrate with the father, they have to embrace the father's love as well. They have to see the son through his eyes and not their own. How many of us struggle to do exactly that with other people? Who've offended us. Struggling to see them through the father's eyes and not our own.

When we come back next time, we're going to meet the older brother because he's one who's still struggling to do just that. But what about you, my friend? In light of the father's amazing love, will you let it drive you to repentance? Will you give yourself up to him in faith and obedience? To worship him as he deserves to be worshipped for the rest of your life. Because that's what this story demands, doesn't it? That's what I'm



calling you to do today. For in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God.

Will you bow with me? Our Father, we pray that you would be so gracious to some in our midst and maybe some listening by live stream and in other places or listening later to the recording. We do pray that you would be gracious to save them, as well. You've already demonstrated your intent to do just that by sending your son in the form of a, not just a man, but in the form of a servant to go through humiliation leaving the abode of Heaven. second person in the Trinity, taking on human flesh and being born as a babe and growing up as a child and into adolescence and the teen years and into adulthood, and then giving himself eventually into ministry to the cross to die for our sins.

Such humiliation for one who is deserving to be lifted up and worshipped by all, adored, and rejoiced in, because of his Majesty, because of his greatness and yet you were pleased to crush him for our sins. It doesn't matter if we're the older brother, the younger brother, or any other number of siblings in that family, father, we are all the same. It is by your grace and by the humiliation of the cross, that any of us comes to you and so, we ask that you would be gracious to save yet more still, and for all of us who know you and know this saving grace, we pray father, that you would help us to see the world through your eyes. You help us to love, as you love. In Jesus' name, amen.