

Message #76**Luke 15:20-24**

Abraham Lincoln was once asked how he would treat rebellious southerners after they had been defeated and reformed to the Union of the United States. The Civil war had been a brutal war and many from the north (360,222) and south (288,000) had died. When President Lincoln was asked how he would handle this he said, "I will treat them as if they had never been away."

Every now and then this kind of thing happens in the business world. Someone leaves a company thinking things will be much better elsewhere and then discovers things aren't so good so they end up coming back. I know of a case where this happened and the response of the president of the company to the employee was "Welcome back, glad you came home."

Taking people who have made some bad choices back is something God does time and time again. Frankly, He has done that with every one of us.

Every once in a while some believer will decide to jump ship from faithfulness to God. Now and then some feel the tug of the world and the lure of the flesh and the Devil and they rebel and drift away from being faithful. But eventually the believer discovers there is no real fulfillment and happiness in a life of sin and rebellion. Eventually the believer discovers that sin leads to problems, loneliness and misery. Every now and then one of these prodigals comes to their senses and they decide to go back home and make things right.

When that happens, those who are like Jesus Christ rejoice and restore, but those who are Pharisaical become jealous and angry. That is the story of the Prodigal Son. When he finally decided he had wallowed in the filth long enough and went home, he discovered two distinct reactions. What we clearly see here is this:

WHEN A REBELLIOUS FAMILY MEMBER REPENTS OF HIS SIN AND DESIRES TO COME HOME AND MAKE IT RIGHT, THOSE WHO ARE CHRISTLIKE REJOICE AND RESTORE AND THOSE WHO ARE PHARISEES BECOME JEALOUS AND ANGRY.

This is a very famous story in the Bible. It is a story comprised of five main parts, two of which we saw last time:

Part #1 - The rebellion of the younger son. **15:11-16**

Part #2 - The repentance of the broken son. **15:17-20**

Now we come to the third part of the parable:

Part #3 - The restoration of the loving father. **15:20-24**

There are many commentators who believe that the real emphasis of this parable is on the father. Some actually name the parable "The parable of the loving and forgiving father." It is certainly one of the critical themes.

We get to see how a father treats a son who has proudly rebelled, walked away from his home and from everything he has been taught and then wasted his inheritance living life as a pig. This is a wonderful passage of forgiveness and an amazing passage of grace.

When the son decided to go home, there are two responses of the father to the son:

RESPONSE #1 – The father responds to the sight of his son. **15:20**

Here is one of the most moving episodes that you will ever read in the entire Bible.

It is not known for sure how long the son had been gone. It must have been for a considerable length of time for five reasons:

- 1) He had enough time to travel to a distant country. 15:13a
- 2) He had enough time to spend a great deal of money. 15:13b
We were watching a program on the ID channel of a wife who killed her husband for a life insurance policy which was worth 100,000. She spent most of it shopping in one month.
- 3) He had enough time to experience a famine. 15:14 - that does not happen overnight.
- 4) He had enough time to get a job. 15:15
- 5) He had enough time to travel back home. **15:20**

All of these factors lead us to the conclusion that this son had been gone from home for quite some time.

But when his son was journeying home and got within range of his father's property, there were five actions taken by the father:

Action #1 - The father saw the son. **15:20a**

The particular verb that Luke uses for "saw" (οραω) is eye-opening. There are two main Greek words one may use βλεπω and οραω. Joseph Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, says that the primary difference between the two Greek words is that βλεπω has to do with a single look where as οραω has to do with a discerning mind which is the result of what is visually seen (Thayer's Greek Lexicon, p. 452).

The difference means that the father is not just glancing at something, he is focused on something. The father spotted his son and he is focused in his mind on the fact this is his son. The father sees the son and at the same time his mind is focused on the fact this is his son.

What this tells us is that this father never forgot about his son. Even though his son was gone and had wandered far away from righteousness, his father continually thought about him and continually looked for him to come home.

It is the visual sighting of the son that prompts all of the other actions. This is important because there is nothing beautiful about this son. There was not much of anything that would have resembled son ship. This son was in rags and according to **15:22**, he didn't even seem to have shoes or sandals. The father saw someone who looked more like a broken down derelict bum than his son. But what this father saw, he wanted. He loved his son and wanted him back.

This is a great view of the love of God. God sees all of his sons at their very worst. He sees them when they rebel against Him and are wearing rags of unrighteousness. He sees them when they are nothing and have nothing and don't even resemble the fact that they are His sons. He still loves His sons and He wants them back. He longs for them to come home into a relationship with Him.

Perhaps you are here and you believe your sin has made you so dirty and ugly that God wouldn't want you, couldn't forgive you or ever use you. Come on home. Come back to Him in your filthy rags. Come back to Him in your worn down and broken down condition for He is looking and waiting for you.

Action #2 - The father had compassion on the son. **15:20b**

The word "felt compassion" is a beautiful word. It is a word that describes a deep feeling of pity and compassion from deep inside. It is a word that describes a very tender affection and compassion that this father has for his son (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 414). This father's heart and emotions were moved by seeing his son.

Instead of this father being angry with his son, he shows compassion on his son. If a sinful, finite father would do this for his son who came home, think how much a perfect God will do that for His child when he comes back to Him. If you have wandered far off into sin, come on home to God.

I will never forget a story told by Dr. Howard Sugden, a pastor who is now with the Lord. He said some very hurt, angry, humiliated parents brought their Christian daughter to his office and in a very hostile manner told him the wretched details. The daughter had fallen into sin and got pregnant. She was very sorry and broken for her sin, but the parents were extremely upset and in some respects rightly so. At the end of them telling him the story, one of the parents, in an almost angry way, almost yelled at Dr. Sugden and said, "What are you going to do about this?" Dr. Sugden did believe in church discipline, but he also believed in grace forgiveness. So he got up from his desk and moved around to the front and with tears in his eyes he took the girl into his arms and said, "I want you to know I love you and will do everything I can to help you because you are an important part of our family."

That is real compassion. That is the same thing God does when one of His erring children come back to Him. If you have wandered away, come back to the Lord, He will have compassion on you.

Action #3 - The father ran to the son. **15:20c**

That word “ran” is a word that was used for running a race. Now this father must have been getting up in years because he was nearing the age when the inheritance could be divided. The text is very specific to point out that the boy was “a long way off.” We may assume that if the father could spot the son, he is looking from some elevated position. When he spotted the son, he took off running at his racing speed. It must have been a downhill run, but it apparently was a long run.

When I used to run, in my late 30’s, I was in at least four races with Warren Utes, a man over 70. Warren died in 2017 at age 96 in the Chicago area. The first race I was in with him was a four mile race. The gun started and we went through the first mile at 5:40. I remember looking at him and thinking, this 70-year-old man is running a 5:40 mile. When we got half way through, he left me in the dust. He ended up beating me to the finish line by about two minutes. Apparently this Jewish father was like Warren Utes. He could run.

By the way, carefully notice who is running to whom. It is not the rebellious son running to the father; it is the forgiving father running to the rebellious son.

God is quick to respond to a rebellious son who turns to Him. He doesn’t waste time; He wants you back.

Action #4 - The father embraced the son. **15:20d**

That word “embrace” indicates that the father threw his arms around his son’s neck and embraced him and hugged him. This is a very moving scene.

If you have ever been in an airport when some daughter or son sees a mom or dad and they just hug them, you can relate to the emotion of this.

This action would have meant much to this son who didn’t even know if he was wanted. The father is hugging a son who had been in horrible sin. This says to the son you are loved; welcome home.

Action #5 - The father kissed the son. **15:20e**

In the Jewish culture, this was a sign of great acceptance and complete reconciliation.

- 1) This happened between Jacob and Esau when they got things resolved (Gen. 33:4).
- 2) This happened between David and Absalom when they got things resolved. (II Sam. 14:33).

At this point, the father does not even know the spirit in which the son is coming home. The son has not spoken one word and has not even spoken of repentance. The father may have assumed it, but he didn’t know it.

From the son's perspective, this must have been staggering. He has no idea when he goes home whether or not the father will even acknowledge that he is his son. He was expecting to be treated as a servant, but he did not know for sure. So this father's reaction must have been a total shock and surprise.

When we suspect a person has repented, we need to make it as easy as we can to come back to God. We should run toward them and not make them crawl to us.

RESPONSE #2 – The father responds to the confession of his son. **15:21-24**

We may remember that the son intended to go to the father and say four things:

- 1) I have sinned against God. **15:18a**
- 2) I have sinned against you. **15:18b**
- 3) I am not worthy to be your son. **15:19a**
- 4) I will be happy to be your servant. **15:19b**

After this remarkable response of the father, the son began to make his confession:

- 1) He confessed his sin against God. **15:21a**
- 2) He confessed his sin against his father. **15:21b**
- 3) He confessed he was not worthy of son ship. **15:21c**

That was all the father needed to hear. That was all the father let the son say.

Wouldn't this be a spectacular moment for any parent with a rebellious child? Can you imagine if that son or daughter came and said, "I have sinned against God and you and I am not worthy of being in this family." What a moment.

Well, when this father heard that, he responded in six ways:

Way #1 - He gave him the best robe. **15:22a**

The "best robe" was rarely worn. This robe was only worn on special occasions at special ceremonies. It was a sign of honor.

Way #2 - He gave him a royal and authoritative ring. **15:22b**

The ring was a sign of authority. In fact, it was a sign of full authority. In Genesis 41:42, Pharaoh gave Joseph his ring and it was a sign of a tremendous position and elevation to authority.

Way #3 - He gave him shoes. **15:22c**

These would have been the best sandals available. Probably this son had worn out his shoes, if he even had them when he got home.

Way #4 - He gave him the best food. **15:23a**

The fattened calf was the best there was. It was used on special occasions such as weddings or sacrifices. It may be that this father is thanking God. This boy is no longer eating pig slop.

In fact, the word “kill” is one used for sacrificing an animal. So this is not only a picture of having full fellowship with the father, but also having full fellowship with God.

Way #5 - He gave him a celebratory party. **15:23b**

This is the way it is when a sinner comes home. There is a celebration party in heaven. God rejoices and those like Him do the same.

Way #6 - He gave him a public introduction. **15:24**

The father made a public announcement; my son was dead and is now alive to the relationship. He was lost but has been found.

I read these verses and realize the song writer got it right:

“Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling.
Calling for you and for me.
Come Home, Come Home.
You who are sinners come home.”