

The Prodigal's Welcome Home

Luke 15:20-24

This is the first time in nearly 30 years of ministering of preaching through the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

But Spurgeon preached on this passage 10 times. And a 9 out of the 10 were on the reception of the son by his Father!

I say that because I want to lean on one of those sermons where he builds everything upon the father's kisses.

The verb is an intensive and can be translated, he kissed him repeatedly.

Now you and I don't live in a kissing culture. When we kiss, it is mostly romantic or for the little ones. I think this is the same for Vietnamese culture – that is one think you did not pick up from the French!

The father's great earnestness, his compassion and love, his hugging his new-found son, is expressed in kissing him over and over.

This reception is the heart of the parable. It is one of the most remarkable thinks in all the Bible. JC Ryle says "More deep and affectionate words than these, perhaps, were never written."

Let us take our first point then with how unkissable the son was.

There was nothing in him, in his appearance, his condition, himself – that led the father to look upon him, run down the road – which was very unEastern for an elderly man – and to show such love to him.

In fact, there is not anything really kissable, loveable in him. He had acted so rottenly – how he left, how he lived, how he wasted his wealth, how he sinned in the flesh, how he sunk so low, how he smelled like the pigs, how he returns of all places to the home he forsook, in rags, barefoot, starving, grimy.

And this is the punch of the parable. You expect something different – a word of rebuke, an angry look, a disgusted look, at least; a laying into him for doing such things.

But no – not a single syllable, or letter, or look of reproof.

It shows us that as God loves us and saves us, there is nothing in us we bring to him except the rags of our sins, the stench of our evil, the poverty of our depravity.

God is self-moved; the father had longed for this very moment – his heart is the full source for his earnest embrace and compassion, for every kiss. We deserve the opposite, for how unkissable we are in our sins.

That is the whole point of the gospel. You can't be saved unless you are a sinner! God says, while we were enemies, his own perfect Son loved us and died for us!

Until you have seen you are an enemy of God by nature, by choice, in your condition, you pretend to be His friend, and you are not. And God isn't saying to you, try to make yourself his enemy – you are already! Own it! Believe it! Hear what the law says about you!

So this is our first point – how unkissable are those whom God saves; He kisses those who are unkissable; He rightly could have turned his

back on all who turn to him. But His compassion, his love, his kisses are greater than our foul sins. His love is far deeper than man's deepest hate.

Our second point then is how wonderful is the love of God here. His kisses stand for nothing less than His reunion with you, to bring you into his embrace, his falling in compassion upon your neck, and saying, I have found you at last!

We are so wound up about making ourselves presentable, winnable to God. That is not the gospel. The gospel is not a call to play poker with God. Do you know, my Vietnamese friends, how to play poker? Have you learned that game here in America? I know you have learned how to play the Lotto!

But we don't offer to God our two pair, or our three of a kind, and he then gives us a few chips, a small pot.

Nor does he play black-jack with us – if I try and get a reasonably high number close to 21 – that's good enough and we are accepted.

We don't have any cards to play with! Our hands are soiled with a stain we can never remove. He must forgive and love us and accept us – and how fully, freely and completely He does.

You see, on our part, it is so difficult to get a hold of our sins, our miseries, our foolishness, our evil, our broken lives and broken words – and turn to God, to arise and go to him, to begin to pray and prepare words what we will say to him when we see him.

But it is not hard for God to love and restore you.

To us, this is such a narrow way, a hard way; but to Him, His way to us is big and broad – it is as wide as his eternal arms, and high as his infinite perfections, and deep as his heart, which is love.

And then see his love melting this son.

How humbled he is now, far more than before; his failure, his breaking the law, did move him to seek help – but it was the love and mercy of God that made him really broken, lowly, and repentant.

He can't even get his speech out about asking to be a servant; he is overwhelmed by the grace and love of his father's kisses!

And this is such a good lesson on repentance. Repentance involves a fruitful knowledge of our sins and a conviction, a piercing inwardly that we have done wrong, and then the will – turning away from those sins.

Well all of this is to take place under the sky of God's love. God doesn't love you BECAUSE you repent. It is not a tradeoff. He loved the son before he returned, as he returned, as he was humbled in his arms. It is a fine distinction, but an important one. God does not love you for your repentance, like a tradeoff; yet he does not love you without it. If you don't have repentance, you have not seen your sins, and you are yet in them. Repentance is necessary for salvation – but it is not the ground, the basis of God loving you. God is the basis for God loving you!

We can never feel worthy of such love! We are not even worthy to be slaves or servants. But God interrupts him with his love.

Now comes thirdly then the generosity in those kisses, in that love, that compassion.

Here is a robe for his rags; the best robe! Here is a ring for his empty hand and pockets! Here are sandals for his bare feet – servants went barefoot, not sons – put them on his feet! And now bring forth the calf – the special fattened calf – for a special occasion, for this is it – for his hungry body! Come, we must celebrate!

See how we do not come to God for his riches, his comforts, his gifts, but first for him, for he comes not for what is ours, not for what we will do for him, but for us. He loves you as you are! Just as I am! We love him because he first loved us.

Our relationship with him, our union with him, is central, is our all in all.

Out of this full love comes full forgiveness and full restoration.

We can see in this robe and ring his new righteousness and adoption; our sins are pardoned and our place is assured.

In the shoes we are kept and sanctified to walk in his ways, to walk in his love, to walk to his glory, comfortably.

The banquet of the fatted calf speaks of restored and richest fellowship; do you see the Christian life as a feast with all kinds of nourishing, delicious, sweet and refreshing things?

Spurgeon speaks of the repeated kisses to his son to keep him assured, comforted, glad in the father's house.

Let us close with a couple considerations then from this rags-to-riches picture.

First of all, God's love has brought his returned children into a radically new relationship. My son was dead, and now is alive! Oh, we are dead apart from God in so many ways. And only He can restore life to us. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. The kisses of God's love are in His proclaimed Son, by His resurrection from the dead. When we turn to the Father, the faith and life he gives is by that resurrection power of His Son. Our being born again flows from the womb of the empty tomb.

Second, God's compassion and kisses more than make alive to God, they bring us into fellowship with him. We are brought home – he was lost and now is found. Oh what a wonder it is to come to know God, to know him as your God, for him to know you, to declare to you that he is your Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and faithfulness. What a blessings to know who you are, what you are, your place in life, your destiny in heaven that is called the Father's house! All this replaces walking blindly, coldly in the dark, a lost stranger to yourself and to the world you walk through!

Oh if God is not your Father, if Jesus is not your Brother who died for you, you do not know this kiss! You do not know life and home as you should! And if you do, how opposite you will be to the other son we are to meet next week. How we desire all to come to our Father and receive His kisses! God rejoices in sinners coming to him; the angels

all rejoice! How can we not be glad with exceeding joy, and not work to that great goal – evangelizing the world?!