

# The Parable of the Father's Forgiveness and Mercy

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Let's go to Luke 15 together. We come to the third parable the Lord is giving in response to the grumbling Pharisees who could not grasp in their minds why Jesus would spend such an inordinate amount of time and affections toward notorious sinners and Gentiles in particular and he's really giving these parables in response to them grumbling about him spending time with these Gentiles, non-Jews, and these "notorious" sinners. So we come to the third one that I've entitled "The Parable of the Father's Forgiveness and Mercy," often called the parable of the Prodigal Son, that's fine, but once again, the main figure of the story is not the boy, all he did was rebel. The main figure of the story is the incredible forgiveness and mercy on the part of this father for the returning son.

Luke 15, beginning in verse 11,

11 "And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"

20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe

and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

Familiar, familiar passage of Scripture but let's renew our joy and let's renew our treasure of the greatness of our God's grace and mercy for sinners. First of all, let's note the sinful wasting of God's gifts and God's glory. The sinful wasting of God's gifts and God's glory. Verse 11, Jesus is giving the parable and he says, "A man," and this man obviously illustrates or represents God the Father. Then he says this, "A man had two sons." The two sons inevitably represent Jews and Gentiles. Now, this would have been hard for the Jew of the day to grasp that God is going to say that non-Jews, that is Gentiles, are actually sons of God. Romans 3:29 tells us, "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also." Yes, of Gentiles also.

So here's he's giving this parable and he wants the Jewish authorities that are grumbling about him spending this time and this compassion towards sinners and Gentiles, he wants them to see that God is about the business of receiving back those who are far off. The Jews had everything: they had the fathers; they had the covenants; they had the rituals; they had the sacrificial system; they had the writings. They had all those great advantages and blessings; they were in God's covenant as a people, not as individual converts, necessarily but as a people. They had all of that but God wants to share with them equally, "I have those who are far off. They didn't have the covenants and the fathers and the rituals and the sacrificial system and all the things to point them to truth that you Jews had, but yet they're still my children and I have to be happy about winning many of them to me. I have to be joyous and about the business of seeing all of my children come home." So while this has a primary application of God reaching the Gentiles who are far away, it has an application to every single soul who comes to Jesus Christ for salvation.

Here are two sons in this parable and they have two very different lives. As it is in our world today and as it always has been, there are often different kinds of kids that come out of the same families: Jacob and Esau; Absalom and Solomon; Cain and Abel. Of course the younger son it says in verse 12, there was a younger son who was going to ask for his share of the estate, that is representative of the Gentiles and how the Gentiles wholesale, if you will, we're apostates and we're separate from God. At least the Jews, while not many of them were individual converts, at least as a nation, they were in the covenant community around the things of God. The Gentiles were not. And so this younger son comes to his dad but his heart is not with the father, his heart is not in the home, he's estranged from the heart and he cannot bear the holy restraints of being in this home. His lust is driving him to go out and set up his own separate life.

He says in verse 12, "Give me my share of the estate," and really the tender of the text here shows this is something of a cold and legal discussion. It's not like a father and son discussing, it's just "give me what's mine. I want what's mine." In the Jewish homes of this day, there was a settled, if you will, truth that the oldest son got the greatest share of the estate and then the other sons would divide what was coming to them. The older son got more because he was responsible for his sisters and his mom should something happen to the father. But every child, every male child, had a share in the estate. He says, "I want what's mine now." Notice the difference between this and a godly attitude. The godly attitude looks to his heavenly Father and says, "Give us this day our daily bread." The godly attitude is, "Lord, help me. I may not be able to be trusted with a lot of stuff. Material wealth might pull my heart away so, God, you know where the balance is. God, help me here. Give me enough to keep me joyous in you and humbled and looking to you." That's not what this boy does, "Give it all to me. I want it all right now." He doesn't need his father, so he thinks. Isn't it true that pride and sensuality are always the roots of selfishness? That's where he is. This is the seed of all sin, that is the lust to be one's own master. He sees his father inevitably as weak and ill-informed; his dad is narrow and irrelevant, not up-to-date perhaps. The cornerstone of his heart and his intent is to be independent of God. Of course, I may say "Father" sometimes and I may say "God" sometimes but you understand the parable represents God the Father.

But being independent of God is the root of all evil and we see it everywhere. Our world today is just awash in that mentality. "I want to do my own thing." Then the abominable audacities of the modern culture. I suppose it's been true in every generation of wanting to be independent of God and indulge in lust and sensualities and then bring God with them as if God approves of their lust and sensualities. He supposes he has a right to be equal to the father. You know, sometimes God answers a sinner's prayer for rebellion. This boy says, "Give me my stuff. I want to go and do my own thing. I want to rebel. I don't want your authority over me. I don't want to have to answer to you anymore. I'm tired of the rules of this household." Sometimes when a kid, an adult, whoever, says, "I want to shake this thing off. I don't want this over my head any longer. I want to do my own thing my own way." Sometimes God answers that prayer. God says, "Very well, you can have it." I think there are two major reasons why God does that. 1. He does it so that he might ultimately bring the rebel back. Secondly, sometimes God answers that prayer

because that person has reached the final stage of reprobation. God says, "Very well, I'm letting you go. I will not draw you back again." Romans 1 teaches us that truth.

So he says, "Give me the part of the estate that belongs to me, that falls to me." I think that's a picture of how common grace has been bestowed on all of us. He says in effect to his father, "You have a debt to me." Isn't that an unrighteous and selfish spirit? His father didn't have a debt to him and that's the way mankind is, it's as if you living and breathing is some kind of right you have. You don't have the right to live and breath. The only right you have is to honor your God. Here he says, "Give me what's mine." I'll tell you what's yours: what you've earned is eternal wrath. That's what you've earned. My goodness, we live in an age that is full of this fatal error that we have all of these certain rights and everybody owes it to us. I don't like to get into "politics" but I'm going to tell you there are some clear biblical principles at play here and this whole notion of the liberal new social progressive they call themselves where they just keep creating things that people have a right to have and then they have a right as the government to take from others to make sure you get it. Friend, that is not righteous whether it's paying for an abortion or some woman's birth control. All of these rights. That's where it comes from: a selfish, throw off the authority of God spirit. "I don't have to answer to anybody. I want what I want when I want it and the way I want it and somebody else had better give it to me."

Sinners are like this: their ruin is not being satisfied with what God has allotted them. This boy is going to go off and live and partying and riotousness and sleeping with prostitutes. Well, there is a good thing in enjoying good fellowship and in good celebrations and sexuality in the bonds of marriage but men want to throw that limitation off. That's what he wants to do. Adam and Eve should have been satisfied in the Garden but they were not. You see, it's madness when men break the bonds that binds them to God and then they call it freedom. Is that not our culture? We want to break off everything where some God tells us that is morally right and this is morally wrong. We want to break up everything that would humble us and give us an accountability to someone and they call it liberty. Friend, if you'll study our founding fathers, they did not establish a Republic called America that was a liberty to indulge in wickedness. It was a liberty under God. They understood that binding themselves to the moral absolutes of Scripture was the sure way for all men to have the most liberties. Don't you be deceived and don't you yoke yourself with the outwardly and willing wickedness who proclaim these words of liberty and freedom when it's a lie. It's madness. It's madness.

Verse 12, "So he divided his wealth between them." This father understood that all the laws in the world, all the restraints he could bring on this boy, all the force he could exert would not make his son love him and honor him. Isn't that true, Moms and Dads? Do a good job raising your kids, of course. Educate them right, of course. You've got to have rules in the family, of course. But you've got to understand: that stuff does not regenerate the heart. Only the gospel can change the heart.

So this father at this age in this situation – by the way, this is not a consistent teaching on how every father should deal with a rebellious child. Every situation is different; the times are different. You just cannot go exactly by this. I've had people tell me, "Well, I'm

going to give all this stuff to my kid. He's a rebel and he dishonors God and he wastes but I'm going to do all this for him because that's what the parable of the Prodigal Son teaches." You're wrong there, sir. This is not a carte blanche standard of how to deal with a rebel. But in this case, this father says, "I can't through restraint and forcing laws get him to love me from his heart." So this wise yet heart-broken father releases his son to learn the folly of his chosen course.

The son quickly forgot his father but from that very beginning stage of rebellion, the father's heart followed strong after the son. Verse 13, he says, "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living." The younger son full of himself and full of foolishness, leaves behind both his aged father and wisdom. He took his father's wealth but he really left his best treasure behind. In his father's heart was a depth of love that he little understood. He's certain that the world out there holds for him a vast supply of joy. The Bible says he journeys, he's going after his liberty. Isn't it true that liberty given to the unwise and immature is always misused. You don't give a child liberties until they show that they have wisdom and some disciplines about their life. This boy cannot see the terrible bondage of his own lust. The Bible says that he goes to a far country. The point is: he longs for that place where he can throw off all restraint. He wants to go to that place where he can play the atheist. "No God over me. No rules I have to answer to. No authority I have to bow before."

So he goes far away but you've got to understand: distance from God is not measured in space but in affection. Some of you sitting here are still at home and still come to church and still going through the motions but your heart is in a far country. You can be far away but on the outside look very near. Ephesians 2:12, "remember you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." So, the Lord is painting a portrait here of these Gentiles that the Pharisees were grumbling about him showing affections for and spending time with. They're far away and the Lord is portraying, if you will, through the parable that this boy has gone far away.

Verse 13 continuing, it says, that he squandered his estate. It has the idea of scattering or winnowing, just wasting it. You know, the sinner is the greatest waster in creation. He squanders God's gifts and God's glory. Do you realize the totality of your being is for the glory of your Creator? It's not like you tip God with a tithe and the rest of it's yours. No, the totality of our being, our eyes, our hearing, our breathing, our doing, our thinking, is to the glory of God and this boy in the most intentional fashion and spirit, goes out to squander and waste the gifts and the glory of God that God stamped on every man. Those who turn their backs on God to "get ahead" are the most deceived men on earth. They are the lords of their enterprises but listen to me: they are slaves of their own lusts. Did you hear that? They flaunt themselves as captains of their own ship and masters of their own destiny but in reality, they're slaves to the sin and lust of their hearts. Adam and Eve squandered the finest inheritance ever bestowed upon people and all mankind are sinful squanderers and wasters just like our father Adam. We need to remember that misery always comes riding on the heels of rebellion. Sin's pleasures are short but sin's sorrows

are long and this boy wasted his wealth. Proverbs 28:19, "He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty."

So here this boy begins to waste everything he got but he wasted much more than gold, he's spiritually bankrupt. Unless there is repentance, he's going to be poor in this life and then he's going to be wretched for eternity. The text goes on and says he wasted all in loose living. That means no restraint, no discipline. It's the opposite of Ephesians 6:4 that says to raise your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. That's what he's getting away from. The world has such attractions and the flesh has its pleasures but one element that the rebel constantly forgets and that's this: for all these things God will bring them to judgment. Ecclesiastes 11:9, "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood." In other words, there are some special joys for youth and for young manhood or womanhood. Then he says, "And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes." Listen: "Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things." They call this a cosmic killjoy that we want to bring on these young people. You know, today the idea is from like 16-27 you're not supposed to be responsible for anything. You're supposed to live it up and indulge in your lust and feel free and enjoy the pleasures of life. That's a lie from Satan. God will bring you to account for those things.

Young rebels don't think about that. The path of sin and rebellion is a descending path. First there's pride, "I, I, I. I want my life. I want my pleasures. I don't answer to anybody." Pride leads to independence, "I'll make my own rules. I'll be my own boss." The writer of Proverbs says, "He who separates himself seeks his own desire." Thirdly, pride, then independence, then thirdly, waste. A complete misuse of their life and their goods. Fourthly, that leads to bondage. The final stage, misery. Misery from temporal and eternal loss. The path of the rebel and the sinner is a digression.

But the path of salvation is ascending. The path of salvation is sober introspection, an honest analysis, "What am I? What is my heart right in when I stand before this true and holy God?" Then there's repentance, just a little honest analysis from the truth of Scripture and you'll see that you need to confess what you are and repent before this God. Repent of all that pride and looking to yourself thinking you're something special. Then there is a returning to God, a humble dependence, a return to placing yourself under God's authority and God's rule and God's reign. Then that leads to life and liberty both now and for eternity.

So first this boy goes out and squanders and wastes God's gifts and God's glory. Secondly, we see sin's misery and God's messengers. Sin's misery and God's messengers. I could have used the word God's servants, it might have been a little better but you know what I mean by it. Look at verse 14, "Now when he had spent everything." What's going to happen is we're going to see very quickly here that things go south on this guy very quickly. Things get hard very quickly and all of a sudden his conscience that has been silent, now that he comes into want, his conscience begins to speak. He can hear it again. He hires himself out, the Bible says, in his time of need. He's no longer the proud, wealthy, independent captain of his own ship, master of his own destiny. He's looking for

something to eat and he hires himself out to someone. He, in effect, enslaves himself. Isn't that interesting? It didn't take long before the proud rebel found himself enslaved. Hires himself out, the Scripture says.

Notice the Bible says in verse 14, "a severe famine occurred in that country." Here's where God's messengers start. The famine was God's messenger. The famine was God's servant. The famine was God's servant sent in mercy to help bring the sinner home. We should be thankful for the rough warnings that awaken the hardened conscience and turn our hearts and minds back toward God. Calamities in this fallen world are visitations of mercy. Did you hear that? Calamities in this present and fallen world are visitations of mercy. It's mercy that that shocking thing happened, that painful event came because I slow down. I looked at my heart and I looked afresh at my God. That's a gift of mercy.

So God had his perfect servant, God sent the famine. Then God has a perfect aim. God's aim is precise like aiming a gun. Now, the famine was like a shotgun blast. The famine came and touched everyone and just went everywhere. You know, a shotgun shell is full of pellets; you shoot it and they go everywhere. But there was one pellet in the shotgun of the famine that was foreordained. It was predestined. It was chosen. It was called. It was elected to be the pellet that would pierce this wayward prodigal's heart. God knows what he's doing. And it came at the perfect time. The perfect servant with perfect aim and perfect timing. At the end of his riotous living when he'd spent it all, then the famine comes. Perfect timing. You say, "Pastor, I've pretty well done my thing. I've kind of gone my own way a little bit. I haven't been all that serious about honoring God and humbling myself and I'm doing pretty good." You ought to be scared to death. You ought to be terrified that God hasn't brought humbling your way.

Perfect timing. The boy has exhausted all of his energies on all those things that cannot satisfy. God sends the famine. God pierces his heart. He has to be enslaved to another man. He's at the end. The Bible says in verse 14 he's impoverished. He's barren, if you will, physically and spiritually. After exhausting himself on the pleasures of this world, he's barren of soul. He's not satisfied any longer. He's like the Psalmist who says in Psalm 4:6, "Who will show us any good?" The Psalmist cries out, "Who will show us any good? This thing is so bad. I'm at the end of my rope. Who will show us any good?" But then God answers back in Isaiah 57:21, "There is no peace for the wicked." You want God to show you good? Repent of your wickedness. No peace for the wicked, God says.

The famine, the poverty, the slavery. Do you know what these things are? He runs out of money. Broken by the famine. Impoverished. Enslaves himself to a man who he'll go out and just feed the man's pigs. Do you know what these are? This the persistent Shepherd finding his sheep up in verses 1-7. This is the diligent homemaker finding her lost coin in verses 8-10. Now look at verse 15, "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." So this is one last-ditch grasp of making it in the world on his own. He's going to enslave himself to a pig farmer. John 8:34, "everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." Satan is a hard master. Listen to me, listen to me this Sunday morning, listen to me: you give Satan and sin some time and every sinner will prove that Satan is a hard master to serve. It will be proven.

You're full of yourself right now, you're cock-sure of yourself right now, you think you've got the world by the toe but it's coming.

Compare that to Jesus. Matthew 11:30, Jesus says, "My yoke is easy. My burden is light." Enslave yourself to me and you'll find life and liberty and true freedom but if you take the bait of Satan and throw off God and God's authority and God's restraints to do your own thing, you're going to find yourself in bondage. Do you know why you're grieved about this pastor's preaching this morning? You're grieved because you are in a stronghold and you can't change. That's how weak you are. You're not strong, you're weak and enslaved and in bondage. That's what you are. You can leave my voice, you can leave this church, you cannot outrun God. And at the end, you will be another proof that his word is true, "Let God be found true and every man a liar," Amen.

So this boy makes one last-ditch effort. "I'll start over again. I'll enslave myself to this pig farmer." And as thoroughly as he threw his lot in with this world, isn't it interesting all of his friends are gone now, all of his buddies are gone now. He's still a stranger. He's in this world that he made his friend and he's a stranger, just a hired slave now. You see, the city of sin allures with its bright lights, its enticing music, its sensual pleasures, its raucous laughter but there comes a time when the lights go out and then there's darkness, when the music stops and there's silence, when the sensual pleasures run out and there's pain and the laughter stops and there's mourning. Sin pays in counterfeit money. The joys of sin are hollowed joys. This man is now the possession of another. Like a man who foolishly handles a rattlesnake and then after the snake strikes him, he caresses the vile viper hoping for healing. This man goes into the world and the world bites him like a venomous adder and then he caresses it again and says, "Help me." Now, let it be known that this man is feeding not sheep or cattle but hogs. You know what hogs were to a Jew? You couldn't be around a hog. You can't touch a hog. That was unclean. So Jesus paints a portrait that this fellow has reached the depths of the depths. You know, sin will, as the old evangelists used to say, keep you longer than you want to stay, cost more than you want to pay and take you further than you wanted to go. It always does. Be certain in your heart, sir, if you refuse to be a child of God, then you will be required to be the slave of Satan.

Verse 16 says he's down to eating the pods that they were throwing out as slop to the hogs. The pods are horn-shaped pods or husks off of the locust tree. The lowest class of this day wouldn't even attempt to eat a pod. Verse 16 says, "no one was giving him anything." That's the miserable reward of serving the idols of this world: they use you and then they throw you away. When his money was gone, of course, his friends were gone. He attached himself to this world, he joined himself to this world and he attached himself to that which could give him nothing.

III. The awakening and repentance. Verse 17, "But when he came to his senses," or when he came to himself. First he's beside himself but now he comes to himself. You see, before a man can return to God, he must return to himself. He must see himself for who he really is and a man finds himself – listen – when he has been found of God. You see yourself, you find the truth of yourself when you have been found of God. The Spirit



strips off the veil that he had placed over his heart and the vile ugliness of his sinful heart is now exposed. He says in verse 18, "I will get up and go to my father." His point is: I must look elsewhere for help, there's no help in this place. This is the grace of God to give him some degree of hope. Don't you know that at this point many would deride him. They would demean him. They would discourage him. They'd say, "You can't go back to your father now. Why, you'll be like a dog if you go back there after what you've done against him and to all of his wealth." But due to the work of grace that was inevitably working in this boy's heart, he understands, "No, it's my father's nature to be forgiven. He's just that kind of father."

We disciplined a man here at Grace Life many years ago for drunkenness. He had gotten in a hotel in south Alabama and wouldn't quit drinking. We sent him a certified letter finally and said, "We love you. We would love to welcome you back if you'll just try. We'll welcome you with open arms." And he said, "When I got that letter stating that I was going to be dismissed from the church but I was still loved, I knew there was something worth returning home to." That man went on to be a city councilman in Florence, Alabama because that's the kind of God we serve. He's a God that's just that way. He's good and ready to forgive.

The boy says, "I'm gonna go home to my father's house." It's interesting, no matter how deep the wickedness and degeneracy he's fallen into, he still calls him his father. He said, "I will get up and go to my father." He says in verse 18, "I've sinned." Now the change has come at last. "I have sinned." The pig sty becomes his church. The pig feed trough becomes his altar. There he acknowledges his sin. He makes no excuses, claims no extenuating circumstances. "I have sinned." Then he really gets it right in the next phrase, "against heaven." Against heaven. Against God is what he's saying. You see, you may sin against many and if you do you ought to get that right but sin is always against God.

Look at verse 19, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." He's talking to himself right now. He hasn't made it back home. He says, "I going to tell my dad I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men." You see, humility is the crowning gem of saving grace. He plans to go back home and toil in menial slavery in his father's household hoping that one day he might earn his way back to some position with his father. Isn't it interesting: the once hated place, his father's house, is where he longs to be. Now he longs to be back even as a slave if that's what his father requires.

IV. The father's forgiveness and mercy. First of all, the demonstration of it in verses 20-21. "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off," still a long way, "his father saw him," somebody said that's the eyes of mercy, "and felt compassion for him," that's the heart of mercy, "and ran to him," that's the feet of mercy, "and embraced him," that's the arms of mercy, "and kissed him," that's the lips of mercy." Is it not amazing that the moment that there's repentance and an attempt to return, God rushed with unqualified, unconditional mercy to welcome this boy back home. Just think about it: his clothes had to have the stench of hog manure on them; he had to be detestable in sight. He was pitiful in condition and all was the results of his own choice and his own sin and primarily against his father. He didn't allow himself to dare think that

his father would welcome him back but listen: there is no sin, no condition, no defilement, no corruption, no wickedness too deep for God's mercy to reach. Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, Says the LORD, Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool."

He's felt compassion. He's run to him. He embraces him. He kisses him. The last thing the text says is that the father kisses him. Now, in this oriental setting, that was a gesture of unconditional embracing community and oneness. It's the kiss of reconciliation so now this boy knows full forgiveness and restoration. He has yet to publicly tell his father I'm sorry but yet the father could see in his countenance and in his life that he'd come to repentance.

The gifts of mercy. Look at verse 22. The father said to his slaves – of course, he said in verse 21, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." So what's the father going to do? The father says to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him." This a robe that the firstborn would wear. The highest honor. This is a Jew and Gentile audience now. The Jews are saying, "We honor Moses. We stayed with the law. We've done the temple ordinances. We've been the people of God and yet you are saying those far, far off reprobate Gentiles are going to wear our honored robe?" Jesus says, "Yup," because it's all grace. The Jews just because they were the people of the covenant and the promises don't get some special grace, everybody gets the same grace. They get the honored robe. So here we have the father saying, "These hog-like clothes don't work anymore. You're back at my house. My sons don't dress like that." Any of you ever heard that growing up? My wife still tells me that except she says, "You look like you ought to be in the nursing home." Do you think I dress nice? She dresses me.

The father said, "Not in my house. You're going to wear the very best robe." Not only just nice clothes, it's clothes of great honor. "You're my son. You're welcome back home." But the point is he didn't just clothe him, he adorned him. Now, you listen to me you wretched, worthless sinner, you vile, God-hating throw off God's authority to do your own thing: the moment you repent and believe on Jesus Christ, God doesn't clothe you, he adorns you with the righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ. You didn't get just a good place, you didn't get just a high place, God said, "My precious Son, Christ, his very righteousness I will adorn you with."

That's good stuff. That's good stuff. No word of wrath. No word of retribution. God forgives. He says, "Put a ring on his finger." Not just any ring, this is the family ring. This is the insignet ring where the men of great wealth and power could impress the image of the signet ring on a doplet of wax and it would seal and their authority then was represented by that insignia in that wax. He says, "He has all the authority and the blessings of my household. Put sandals on his feet." He's barefoot by now and slaves didn't wear shoes. You had to be higher up in the culture to wear sandals. "Put sandals on his feet."

Lastly, the joy of mercy, verses 23-24. Verse 23, the father says, "Let's kill the fattened calf." This wasn't just a fattened calf, this is a definite article. There was one calf he had waiting for this boy. "We're going to have a feast like no other feast. "Listen to me: God knows how to throw a party. Some of you are so spiritual, "Oh, we can't have a big time because, you know, we've got to be humble." Look, there is a proper and appropriate place to celebrate in the Lord. "Kill the fattened calf. The very best food I have we're going to have and we're going to celebrate." He says in verse 24 "because this boy has come back to life. He was dead and he's come back to life." Ephesians 2:1 says, "You were dead in trespasses and sins." The soul apart from the vine, Christ, is dead. He's come to life. Jesus said in John 5:25, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming," listen, "and now is," this is the age where this is happening, "when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." Every time somebody is saved, it's a spiritually dead one hearing the voice of the Son of God and coming to life. He was lost, verse 24, but now he has been found.

And so he says here twice, he says in verse 23 "kill the fattened calf. We're going to celebrate." In verse 24 he said "he's dead and he's come to life. He's lost, he's found and let's celebrate." Twice he says "we're going to celebrate." So, once again, we come to this theme of joy, of great, great joy. You see, God is the happiest being in the universe. Did you hear that? God has more joy than any other being in the entire universe. Hebrews 1:9 speaking of God the Son, Jesus Christ, "You've loved righteousness and hated lawlessness therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions." God is exceedingly happy and full of joy. God's happy with himself. Did you know that? God's tickled to death over himself. Do you know why? What else is he going to be tickled about? You? An angel? He's so infinitely, radically unique and superior he can't find joy in anything else like he can find joy in himself. If he was enabled to have joy in lesser than himself, he'd be lesser than God. You can tell something about a person by what they have joy in. Did you hear me? You know something about their character and their integrity by what they find joy in. God is exceedingly happy with God. He has immeasurable happiness. God is so happy over being God. He's so happy over the redemption of his children. He's so happy about how perfectly it was planned. He's so happy about how perfectly it was executed. And he's so happy about how perfectly it's going to conclude and how perfectly the redemption of his children will show forth his beauty, his wisdom, his power and his glory.

I'm going to let you in on something: you're getting saved because it serves the end of glorifying God and making him happy. Your salvation is far more about God than it is about you. I'm going to let you in on another secret: if the salvation of man was the only and primary thing, no one would go to hell but it's not the only and primary thing, the glory and happiness of God is the only and primary thing and God will be glorified when souls in hell receive the just condemnation for their sins. His justice will be glorified by those souls in hell being punished. You need to repent and get your mind off of yourself. You're too man-centered. God is happy about everything that he's doing, exceedingly happy.

I'm not going to read it. My time is more than gone but in the last verses 25-32, the other son who stayed at home is selfish, embittered and resentful. Have you ever known anyone that was selfish, embittered and resentful? They will flat kill a party. Have you ever invited people to a party and said, "I really ought to invite them but, man, they just kill the thing." This boy says, "Daddy, I've been here the whole time. I've never forsaken you. I stayed in your household. I haven't squandered your wealth with prostitutes like my younger brother did and you never gave me a fattened calf, you never let me make merry with my friends. We haven't had a big party about me." That's the Jews. That's the grumblers. That's who he's talking about. They're grumbling because Jesus is reaching out to notorious sinners and Gentiles. Jesus said, "All the truth we've given to the world so far, you Jews, has come through you. You've had it all. These guys have been way, way, way far away from the covenants and promise so when one of my elect comes out of the realms of the notorious sinners of the Gentiles, it just makes me especially happy." That's how he ends the chapter. The Parable of the Forgiving and Merciful Father.

Let's bow in prayer.