

"The Compassion Of The Father"

This story is usually called the story of The Prodigal Son. Some students of Scripture have said it would be better to call it the story of the waiting father or the compassionate father. The father is the hero of the story. We read in **verse 20** where the father, *felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him*. The Greek word translated *compassion* comes from the word for your inner organs, your heart and guts. That's why the translation doesn't just say he chose to show compassion but that he felt it. He *felt* compassion.

If there is any thing that is clear from **Luke 15** it is that people are often miserably out of touch with the compassion of God. Look at the background, **verses 1-2**: *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."* The chapter begins with Jesus standing between two groups of people. The sinners in **verse 1** were real sinners! The Pharisees and scribes were very religious people with high moral standards. You could call these two groups the rule breakers and the rule keepers. Some people have wondered if we can see democrats and republicans reflected in these two distinct groups of people. I thought about that – and I can see it in part but the fit certainly isn't perfect. The thought is usually that the tax-collectors and the sinners are sort of like the democrats. They want to raise taxes, and rebel against traditional moral standards. On the other hand the Pharisees and scribes are a little like republicans. They are more often religious conservatives like the Pharisees, and constitutional textualists like the scribes. So then the prodigal son becomes like the democrats and the older brother like the republicans. You can sort of see similarities but I think it breaks down in the end because there are a lot of republican who party like the prodigal and are pretty scandalous sinners and there are a lot of democrats who are whiney and entitled self-serving do-gooders like the elder brother. I think we will have to be content with seeing a little of ourselves in both of these very polarized groups and recognizing there is more than one way to be far from God. In the end the good news is found in the embrace of the Father who loves both of the sons and all kinds of people. What Jesus shows us in this story is that **God is a compassionate father who loves all kinds of broken people. He wants us to live in light of his profound compassion.**

I. THE HEART OF GOD IS FULL OF COMPASSION FOR THE VERY PEOPLE WE MIGHT LOOK DOWN UPON.

He does something here I don't think he does the same way any other place in Scripture. He tells not one, not two, but three stories one after. He tells the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. In each of the three stories something ends up lost. But what unites all three stories is not simply that something is lost but that what was lost *really* meant a lot to someone. The lost lamb really meant something to the shepherd. The lost coin really mattered to the woman. The lost son meant the world to the compassionate Father.

A. The “sinners and tax-collectors” in verse 2 were on the opposite side of many issues Bible-believing people cared about in Jesus’ day.

What Jesus does is he shows them that God’s compassion for those people on the other side is great. God cares deeply for them. *To see the compassion of God for all people is an antidote for the poison of polarization that was an issue in his day and in ours.*

I read an article this week about how people today tend to assume the worst about whoever is on what they perceive to be the “*other side*” in today’s divides. The article said that many Christians do the same thing the larger world does. They choose sides and charge into battle, in comment threads, and things like that, armed with the same snap judgments and damning assumptions about others’ motives that mark the worst polarization in the larger culture. There was a part of this article that was almost funny but for the sadness of it. It said there is a tendency to assume the worst, read into what people say and then take the most condemning view of it.

Someone says, “*Racism is still a problem.*” Someone else responds: *So you’re saying we should abandon the gospel and embrace neo-Marxism.*

Someone says, “*We need to keep the gospel first.*” Someone else responds: *So you’re saying we should just shrug our shoulders at injustice.*

Someone says, “*Black lives matter.*” Someone else responds: *So you’re denying that all lives matter.*

Someone says, “*Marriage is a complementary union between a male and a female.*” Someone else responds, *So you’re saying you hate gay people.*

Someone says, *“During the COVID-19 pandemic, we should shelter in place to protect the most vulnerable.”* Someone responds: *So you’re saying you’re anti-freedom and want us all to bow to tyranny.* Someone says, *“We should reopen the economy to help those whose livelihoods and mental health are being devastated by quarantine.”* Someone responds: *So you’re saying you want the virus to spread and more grandmas to die.*¹

There are real issues that have to be considered. Truth matters and love rejoices in the truth. But it is possible to be so caught up in the conflicts of the day that we lose our sense of the compassion of the Father for all people. It becomes just us and them. Then, instead of seeing lost people we just see adversaries and opponents.

B. Lost people matter and it's worth the effort to find them.

The shepherd goes out and searches for the lost sheep. The woman tears the house apart searching for the lost coin. The sheep was lost because of its own stupidity someone had to go after it. The silver was lost through carelessness. Someone had to search until it was found. The son is a little different. He was lost through his own stubbornness. He had to come to his senses, which is itself a gift of God's grace. Look at the five indications of the Father's compassion for His son in **verse 20** alone: 1st) He watched for him, 2nd) had compassion on him, 3rd) ran to him, 4th) embraced him, and 5th) kissed him.

It is not enough to be correct. God wants us to reflect his compassion in the way we engage the world, our culture, and its people. This is our greatest mission. Don't let anything steal your heart, your energy, your passion away from God's agenda. God wants lost people found. This is the mission that should inspire us and unites us: working as God's servants to find lost people and bring them to him.

B. Jesus is telling us something we need to know about His heart and God's heart!

Notice the rejoicing that runs through the passage. In **verses 6-7** when the shepherd finds the lost lamb he calls his friends to rejoice with him. In **verse 9-10** when the woman finds her lost coin she calls her friends to celebrate. If we read on we see that when the father's boy came home the father threw a party and had every one come celebrate. Look at what Jesus says in **verse 10**; *Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Do you understand that you matter to God? Do you know he has compassion for you? Do you believe he rejoiced the moment you received Christ and still rejoices over you with love? If you haven't come to Christ, do you know that if you will that will bring him joy?

II. GOD IS SO COMPASSIONATE HE JOYFULLY EMBRACES THE MOST RECKLESS OF REBELS THE MOMENT THEY REPENT.

This is the lesson of the prodigal, the story of the younger son. The story of the prodigal starts out with a speech he makes to his father.

Luke 15:12-13: *And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.*

Kenneth Bailey, studied the parables of Jesus in light of the culture of the middle east. He writes:

For over fifteen years I have been asking people of all walks of life from Morocco to India and from Turkey to the Sudan about the implications of a son's request for his inheritance while the father is still living. The answer has always been emphatically the same...the conversation runs as follows:

Has anyone ever made a request in your village?

Never!

Could anyone ever make such a request?

Impossible!

If anyone did, what would happen?

His father would beat him, of course!

Why? The request means - he wants his father to die.

The prodigal son's request was a heartless rejection of his father. He was saying, *"I want what you can give me but I don't want you. I want to live as if you were dead."* Of all the stories Jesus could come up with to show us the ugliness of sin and highlight the love of God, he didn't come up with a murderer, a rapist or a thief, he comes up with a child who says: *"Father, I want what you can give me but I don't want you."*

I once heard a father tell of holding his very young child in front of a mirror. At first the boy didn't recognize what he was looking at but then all of a sudden his eyes widened and he saw that he was looking at himself. That's the experience Christ wants us to have here. You may be thinking, "Hey, I'm not an immoral person." Well, that's good but

look deeper. Do you cherish your relationship with God or do you just want what he can give you? What if God said; "O.K. if you want I'll just give you your inheritance, your share of my blessing in time and for eternity I'll sign it all over to you and you don't even have to think about me." Do you want what God the father gives but you do not cherish your relationship to God the father Himself?

The story of the younger brother is the familiar story of someone indifferent to the love of God setting out on a journey of self-discovery. But like the prodigal in this story, when you ignore the love of God you always end up disappointed, empty and hungry. There's only one thing to do. **Verse 17** says: *he came to himself.* Some versions translate it *he came to his senses.* But isn't it interesting that he set out on a sort of journey to find himself and *only truly came to himself* when he hit bottom and turned back to his Father?

What kind of father was waiting for him? When the Father saw the son he didn't wait to hear the speech the son prepared. He gathered his robe in his arms and ran across the field pounced on his son and hugged and kissed him. Jesus is showing us that God wants us to feel His kiss and know His compassion. There is nothing like the Love of the Father, which we so often take for granted.

Our vision as a church should be to point people to God, not as a source of the stuff that will bring you happiness in life but to God Himself as the source of life Himself.

Now, the younger brother shows us one side of God's compassion but the story of the older brother shows us another. Act two is the story of the lost older brother. What it shows us is that...

III. GOD'S IS SO COMPASSIONATE HE OFFERS HIS ETRAVAGENT GRACE TO THE MOST WRETCHEDLY SELF- RIGHTEOUS IF THEY WILL REPENT.

The older brother in the story might not seem to be lost but he is. In each of the three stories in this chapter something is lost. It's not where it should be; the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. In each story someone who goes out to seek and find what is lost. But in this last parable the father does not go out to seek for the younger brother. The Father goes out to greet Him but the prodigal returns on his own. Where in the story is the seeking for that which is lost? It is in **verse 28**, which says: *But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.* The older brother seemed to be doing all the duties of a good son but inwardly he was far from his

father's heart. His father has to go out to him and plead with him. Even when his father pleads with him he stays angry. In the end he is the one who refuses to go in and take part in the Father's banquet. He shows us there is more than one way to be far from God.

The older brother looks outwardly obedient but in his heart he's like the younger brother in that he does not cherish the Father.

Ask the question: *What does He love more, the father's heart or the Father's stuff?* It's obvious that he is more in love with what the father can give him than he is with who the father is. Look at **Verse 29**: *but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.* Our emotions and words reveal so much about us don't they? There's *anger* here. When he says: *Look*, it is like he said: "Look you". The word, "serving" is the Greek word for serving as a slave. Some versions translate this all these years I have slaved for you. The word "commands" or "orders" underscores the way the older brother views his relationship to the Father. People whose hearts are far from God will sometimes try to keep God's commands so that they can earn God's blessings and avoid his punishments. The result is that on the surface they are trying to keep the rules but underneath they hate it, it feels like a kind of slavery from which they wish they could be free.

If you say or think something like this: *"If God doesn't answer this prayer, if God doesn't let this happen, then what good is being a Christian?"* That thinking reveals a heart like the older brother's. That perspective sees God as the one who gives the orders you have to obey so that he will then give you the good stuff that makes life worth living. There is more than one way to be far from God's heart. There's more than one way to be lost.

Sometimes outwardly good people can be more lost than obviously bad people. Maybe you remember this illustration: If you get hit by a truck and dragged down the street and your head is torn off and your body is in tatters you are dead. And if you go to sleep and have a heart attack and never wake up you are dead. Which person is more dead? One person is messy dead and the other is nicely dead but they are both equally dead. In the same way if you are lost you are lost. It *might, however*, be valid to speak of someone as more lost if they are less likely to find their way home. And that seems to be one of the points that Jesus makes here. *Sometimes good people can be more lost than bad people in that they are less likely to discover their lostness and find their way home to the compassion of the Father.*

CONCLUSION

Look at how the story ends. **Luke 15:31-32** *And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'* We all need that. We need to live as sons and daughters of a God of compassion. We all need to believe that he embraces us no matter how recklessly we have run from him and he pleads with us when we have misunderstood his heart and stand off from him and others, hurt and angry and full of self-pity. He pleads with us to come into his embrace. To believe in and receive his compassion and live, so filled with his compassion that we share it with others and proclaim it in the world.

There's a hint in the story of how costly that compassion is. The younger brother demanded his share of the inheritance, and lost it all. That means the gifts of grace, the ring, the robe, and the fatted calf are all part of the elder brother's inheritance. That's why the elder brother is so mad. By rights it's the elder's brother's robe, a ring, sandals, and calf that are given to the repenting prodigal. That's the elder's brother's inheritance! The only way anything can be given to prodigal son is if the elder brother pays for it. So when we hear this story I think we are meant to stop and think, "Wow the only way this could ever really be true is if we have not only a loving and gracious father but also an elder brother who, like the father, is also compassionate and who, out of love for the father and for us, will pay the price for our reconciliation."

*Of course that's the point. **We have an elder brother who has paid the price for our reconciliation.** Hebrews 2:11 says that Jesus "is not ashamed to call us brothers". **Jesus is everything the elder brother in the story is not.** He left the Father's house, to reveal His compassion to rebellious children. Jesus Christ came to earth and through his love and obedience to God He earned for us what the robe the sandals, the ring and the calf represent, all the good gifts that we lost through our sins and our wanderings. And that compassion is costly. His robe was stripped off of him and he was mocked and beaten. Instead of the signet ring he got the crown of thorns. He was paying for our sins so that we could come to the father and receive the compassion we do not deserve and could never earn. *This story invites you to come to the Father and receive His compassion and it challenges us all to share his compassion. So come to him and stay close to him.**

Amen

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/false-gospel-assuming-worst/>

The Lord's Supper
Institution
Apostles' Creed
Confession
Assurance

Announcements

Men's Ministry this week will return to the regular time and place. The men are meeting at the church, in the worship area at 6:00.

I'm teaching from Acts this week on the power of a personal testimony. The men will also be talking about a shared mission during these challenging times. All are welcome there is no need to register.

Our 19th Annual Race Day Service & Picnic is next Sunday, February 14th, at 10:45 am at the Port Orange City Center Amphitheater. We'll have a brief outdoor worship service followed by a catered picnic lunch. We are catering boxed meals from Dustin's Bar-B-Q this year as opposed to serving from a buffet line. Individual canned & bottled drinks will also be served. We will be observing our normal protocols for worship services by recommending masks and social distancing. All food and drink will be provided by CCC. We need people to RSVP no later than Sunday, February 7th, via the response card on the app or by email to ccc@cccdaytona.org in order to have an accurate number of

people attending. Information cards and a sign up sheet will be available in the lobby.

Casey Johnson Tribute

Casey Johnson our former student at RTS and co-worker here at CCC helped us start our network.

He's turning 50 this week.

Favorite memory – going from a student in class to a co-worker at CCC and going to acts 29 and exponential church planting seminars. Casey and Anthony rooming together when Casey Anthony was a notorious woman in Central Fl.

Favorite characteristic – gospel centered passion for Christ and church planting.

Casey we love and miss you - We are encouraged by your labor for Christ in Madison with Redeemer city church my the Lord bless you in all ways with great fruitfulness and may he sustain you with his gracious presence in all of the hardships of life and ministry.