
The song you just heard was a song of LOVE. A song describing the love of Jesus for us. I want you to see depiction of love...this time not through a song, but a picture... Study the man ...



What's he doing? He's running... He's just seen something that makes him want to run. What is it? Who is it? What he has seen is his lost son returning home. This is a picture of the prodigal son's father...and He's running! I'm going to tell you why I believe he's running in a few minutes AND why this would have been unheard of in the first century Jewish culture. For now...study his face... What was he thinking? I'll tell you what I believe...I believe he was straining to make sure that what he thought he was seeing was actually true... ***“Could it be...after all this time...could it be that his boy was coming home? It looks like him...is it really my boy coming home!”***

Church, that is a picture of LOVE. The love of a father for his son. And Church, that picture is also a picture of God, the Father, and the love He has for you and for me! Tonight, we're just 9 days away from Valentine's Day, and we're going to talk about love. No...not the love of a husband for a wife or a sweetheart for his sweetheart...but, the Love of God, the Father, for us! You just saw from our skit this parable, told by Jesus, portrayed by Scott and Jackson...and now, we're going to go even deeper. Tonight: LOVE as seen through the eyes of the Prodigal Son's Father!

Luke 15:11-12

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² 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.

According to the dictionary, the word "Prodigal" means: "**recklessly wasteful.**" This young son comes to his dad and says, "I want what's coming to me." Now Church, I want to tell you right off the bat...this story is one of the most important stories in the entire Bible, because it's the story of what our Heavenly Father is like. If you want to know how God feels about you, if you want to know how much you are worth in His eyes, if you've ever wondered if you have any significance, then this story is for you.

Now, let me quickly set the scene, because we are in verse 11 of chapter 15, (because, there's obviously been 10 verses before this), let's find out what was happening. In those previous ten verses Jesus was addressing a group of people that included a bunch of muttering Pharisees.

They were complaining to Jesus because they thought Jesus was hanging out with the riffraff of Israel (and He was...Jesus came to seek and save that which is lost). But, what the Pharisees didn't like was the fact that He, Jesus, as a Rabbi was dragging down the reputation of all Rabbis by associating with the outcasts of society.

Of course, this muttering and whispering doesn't sit well with Jesus. So, He turns to them and tells them about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep and lost one, and a woman who had ten coins, and lost one, and then a father who had two sons, and lost one. Chapter 15 is all about being LOST, then found. It's all about the LOVE of God for us, to come looking for us, by sending Jesus to come for us!

In verse 12, the younger son says, "Give me what's coming to me." See the depiction:



Folks that so rude! You don't get an inheritance until somebody dies, right? So, in essence, the younger son, said, "Dad, I wish you were dead!" Folks, that's bad...really bad!

So, what does the Father do? He gives him what he asks for. Well...he has to do some things first...like begin to sell off property, possessions, even herds. Now folks, we need to try to wrap our arms around this. When the Father sold began to sell his property and possessions so as to be able to give the younger son his share, the Father also gave the older son his share. **In order for the Father to give the younger son his inheritance,** the Father must do this thing as if he were dead. The younger son will get his inheritance in cash and the older son will get his by way of the title deed to Father's property...the share that still had the house on it and likely at least half of the land...understand in that culture...it was acceptable to give the older son a double portion of the land...but we're not told how the father split the inheritance...we're just told he did.

Nonetheless...here's the point Jesus is making by telling this parable... Jesus has actually been building to this. And what He has shared this far is ordinary...the people of that day knew what it was like to see a shepherd search for a lost sheep...and everyone has lost a coin before...there's nothing out of the ordinary in either of those accounts...OH...but this one...OH...the actions of this father...well, that's unheard of in Israel...in that first-century culture. Because no son would EVER be so disrespectful to demand what this young son was demanding. Watch this play out, verse 13.

Luke 15:13

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.

Did you catch the “not many days later,” that delay was so the Father could liquidate the inheritance? Again, he had to find a buyer for the younger son’s portion of the family farm, his portion of the family jewels, his portion of the family livestock. And the only people he could sell to were other people in the village, the surrounding area.

Now think about this...as Jesus is telling this story, His listeners had to be shaking their heads at the horribleness of what the Father was going through. They must have thought: “What is he doing? This is such an insult...this is so shameful...this guy’s son is actually wishing him DEAD...and now he is doing the unthinkable--selling off his property, possessions...everything that’s been in his family for generations. Oh, my goodness!”

Yes, it’s bad...really bad...and that’s Jesus’ point. This is SHOCKING! Now let me ask this: Would this son ever deserve anything from the Father in the future... Nope! Nothing! Well, the son leaves...can you see him leaving the village and the townspeople looking at him...thinking... “What a no-good punk this is!” So, he heads off to a “far country.” There will be no contact with home or the Father or anyone...and that’s fine with the son... You know, he doesn’t realize it...but, he’s on his way to his own personal hell. What does he do?

Luke 15:13b

¹³ ...and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

And that phrase is why he’s called the “prodigal”...he recklessly wasted it all. And now he’s at the bottom of the barrel... He’s got nothing and he’s hungry. He’s got to find a job...any job...but, what can he do...he has no experience...he’s so young...he has no seasoned, marketable abilities...so, he can only find a job working for a pig-herder.

Luke 15:14-15

¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to^[b] one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

Take a look at how that looked...



A pig-herder! No self-respecting Jewish boy would even be around pigs...much less touch them. You see, for the Jews, pigs were considered unclean animals according to the Law of Moses. The problem is...if you are a pig herder, you are literally working with pigs seven days a week, which meant you couldn’t properly keep the Sabbath according to the Law of Moses...because (by touching the pigs...unclean animals) you were considered unclean yourself, and therefore you couldn’t go into a synagogue, nor the Temple.

This is the bottom of the barrel...and it appears the job doesn't pay well enough to stave off his ravaging hunger. And so, what does he resort to?

Luke 15:16

16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

Let me show you what these pods were...



What he ate was carob pods. These pods grow on a flowering, evergreen shrub and are flat, bean-like pods that are in the pea family. They have seeds inside...



These seeds could be ground down into a powder and used as a sweetening agent for baking. They didn't taste bad...but, it was like eating sugar...after a while it made you sick...like when you ate too much chocolate cake as a kid. Imagine how the young man felt. I saw this picture and I thought...



"Yeah...that'll work...that would describe how he felt." What a catastrophe! What a disaster! That's a picture of what it looks like when you are FULL OF YOURSELF. That's a picture of devastation! BUT SOMETHING BEGINS TO HAPPEN to this young man. He begins to think honestly about himself. He knows there is no life for him here...he's going to die...and then it happens...He wakes up from his prideful stupor! Verse 17...

Luke 15:17-19

¹⁷“But 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! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’”

HE CAME TO HIMSELF... church family, I would argue, in order to be saved we must do that. We come to a place where we realize we have no hope and no way of getting ourselves out of our mess. The young man finally realizes this...but, he's blown it with his dad and yet, where else can he find work? No one in this God-forsaken place will hire him except a pig farmer and if he goes back home, BUT THERE...oh...nobody in the village is going to hire him...they probably think...
“Serves him right...no-good punk! Made his dad sell all of that stuff. He's got what's coming to him!”

But, maybe his dad will hire him as a servant. *“I'll ask to be a servant...what else can I do...I'm going to have to lean on the mercy of my Father.”* Off he goes... And church...this is where the Father enters the scene, front and center...and now it's all about the Father...because the son is hopeless and helpless and can do nothing! The question is: What will the father do...will he receive him or shun him?

Luke 15:20a

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father...

Now think with me... How long has the boy been gone? Long enough to waste a lot of money, right? Months...maybe a couple of years...possibly even 3 or 4 years? Folks, it's been a long time. And you know the father had to wonder if he'd ever see his son again. Yet, I believe there wasn't a day that went by that he didn't look to the horizon...hoping...longing to see his son...

You know the Father knew his son was big-time immature...so full of himself. You know he knew his son would never make it. He knew his son's character was suspect and I believe he knew his son bound to fail. The question was...would his son's free-fall kill him, before he came to his senses?

When you have a child that's living for the world...so lost...so prodigal...it's easy to begin to doubt. You blame yourself...you wonder what you could have done, should have done, shouldn't have done... But, that's not helpful. What you do is pray! And I believe that's what the Father had been doing. Praying! Every day! Hey...mom...dad...you can do the same. Don't give up...keep praying! I believe that's what the prodigal's father was doing... And now see all of verse 20...

Luke 15:20

²⁰ And 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.

Remember our picture...



Remember the look on his face? Can I tell you what I think... I believe when the Father saw that familiar gate...walk of his son, he took off out of excitement and joy...but, what about the townspeople... He's got to come by John's place and Phil's place and Bill's place...oh...they're going to hammer him... He's got to face all that scorn and mocking... I've got to get to him...

So, he runs..., but wait, no self-respecting older gentleman runs in the first century. That's absolutely improper...undignified! It's an outrageous thing he does, because an Oriental nobleman with flowing robes never runs anywhere. Because it would expose his ankles, and you didn't do that... But, he's going to run in front of John and Phil's houses. That would be humiliating! No, that's not humiliation, that's the LOVE OF THE FATHER... Instead of letting his son run the gauntlet of humiliation, the father is going to run the gauntlet for him.

The Father was once again willing to suffer HUMILIATION for his son. The father had to let him go in the first place, so his son could come to his senses... Folks, understand this...whether it's someone in your life or it's you...sometimes we've got to hit rock bottom before we ever look up...

And so now, the father is willing to suffer for his son again...so he runs!!

Does the son deserve it? No! But, I would say...neither did the father. Does the father deserve to be mocked for running and showing mercy...No! But, love wins! Love triumphs! Love does the unexpected. Love sacrifices! The Father was determined to restore his son and that takes LOVE!

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD...HE GAVE...HE WAS HUMILIATED...watching His son die on Calvary! The Father gets to his son and Jesus tells us that he embraces him...



and he kissed him...no, not just once...but, in the Greek the word means over and over on the neck! “Kataphileo,” which literally means, “to kiss again and again.”

Now picture yourself in this scene. You have wronged God, and you know it. You’ve blown it...BIG TIME...and so you come to God and you’ve got your whole speech planned out. But, you never get to deliver it. The Lord never let’s you begin. The minute you approach Him, He embraces you and kisses you on the neck, you see, the son never got a chance to say his whole speech.

Luke 15:21-24

²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’^[c] ²² But the father said to his servants,^[d] ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

A fattened calf...no...way...it’s Israel...they normally would have a lamb... That’s true...but, not if you are trying to feed the whole village. Yep...get this...the Father is going to feed the whole village so they can see that he has accepted BACK his son... He is reconciling with his son and is saying, “Hey everybody, I’ve taken him back and so should you.” He wants everyone to have a relationship with his son.

Wow! What a story! It is a rags-to-unbelievable-riches story. Only the riches aren’t about money, it’s about love...the love that the Heavenly Father has for you and for me!

Church family, do you see what Jesus was doing with this story? He was communicating to every person who ever wanted to take a step towards God, that God is willing to receive you, if you will repent...as the son did and come home! And when you do...He’ll RUN!! He runs to us.

He doesn’t let us bear the shame of living our lives as if we wished He were dead. He bears the shame and humiliation for us. God the Father sent Jesus to pay our sin debt so that we could become royalty...His children... It wasn’t a fattened calf that was sacrificed on Calvary...it was the Lamb of God...Jesus Christ, God’s one and only Son. And the Father did all of that for you and for me, so that we could be saved from ourselves.

So, we're finished with Jesus' parable...No... There's another paragraph, because there's the other son...the older one!

Luke 15:25-32

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 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 was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 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. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ 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.'"

Now remember church, we just read verse 32, but I want you to see verse 1 and remind you who Jesus has been talking to? There's a crowd around Him...whose there?

Luke 15:1-2

¹ 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 tax collectors and sinners were the younger son, the Pharisees were the older son. Again, remember, when the father separated the property and the inheritance, the younger son got cash, but the older son, well, he now owns everything...everything else that he and his father now live on. It belongs to him.

But, he's mad and refuses to join the party. Again, this would be an insult to the father, and he would be humiliated again, in front of the whole village, because the older son's role at this party would have been to welcome the guests, since it's his property/his house. **But, he rejects his father** and his younger brother, and that's what the Pharisees were doing. They couldn't fathom that Jesus would even consider being seen with folks they said were the "low-life's," like tax collectors and sinners.

But, the Father says, "Son...why are you complaining...all of this is yours. You've had it for months...years..." You see, the Pharisees were the ones whose hearts were far-off too and Jesus was teaching this, "The younger son understood and accepted the fact that he was far-off and he repented and came home. He admitted he was lost. And the father, showing great mercy, welcomed him back home. But, the older son, in his pride couldn't accept this. Because, he didn't care about his younger brother, but only himself. And now he was far off, outside the fence in his pride."

Church family, do you see what Jesus has shown us tonight through this parable? God has been pictured as the RUNNING FATHER...the one willing to allow His Son to be HUMILIATED IN ORDER TO BRING US HOME.

I'll ask as we close tonight... Are you one of the sons? Do you need to repent? Will you come home? Will you let the Father love you? Listen, it doesn't matter what you've done, it doesn't matter what you've become, you could EVEN NOW be eating the pig pods of the world...but, you can come to your senses like the younger son and come home.

Maybe you're here tonight and you're the older son. Maybe you've been complaining to the Lord for your lot in life. You feel God has not been fair to you in some way. Listen, if you are a follower of Jesus, if you are truly born again, saved...if you have genuinely received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you own it all. Maybe you don't have a perfect life and things are hard, maybe you see someone else doing better than you are financially or whatever the case might be...but, never forget...who your father is and what your inheritance is. Heaven... and never forget how much you are loved.



See the running father! And now see these lyrics we'll be singing in a moment... See them before we sing them.

**I'm forgiven, because You were forsaken
I'm accepted, You were condemned
I'm alive and well, Your spirit is within me
Because You died and rose again.**

**Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my king would die for me
Amazing love, I know it's true
It's my joy to honor you**

As we sing...be grateful...be amazed...be thankful for the love of Jesus and the running Father!
