
The Forgiving Father.

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 20 July 2025

Lamentations 3:22-25 • Luke 15:11-32



Prayer, Lord Jesus, open our heart and mind that we might see and understand what it is you want to show us in your word this day, Amen.

Let me begin in this way. If I was to go to the local cafe or pub and ask people what they thought God was like, for those who even gave such things a thought, I suspect that many of the ideas or beliefs about God would not line up with reality.

What if say 2000 years ago I was able to ask the same the question in equivalent places? Again I would probably find similar misunderstandings.

What, though, if I was to go, not to the equivalent of a pub or cafe, but to a synagogue, the equivalent of a church in the day. Would I find thinking that did not line up with the gospel? Would I find judgemental attitudes? Would I find folk thinking they could somehow work their way into a Gods good books?

Well, given the story we have just heard, and the two that precede it in Ch 15, Jesus is clearly challenging something. The 3 stories are Jesus answer to the first 2 vs. "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus, and the Pharisees and the teachers in the Law, were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them".

A 20 second summary of the first two stories. The lost sheep and the lost coin. The point is simply this, we should not judge and we can't work our way into Gods good books. After all, a lost sheep and a lost coin can do very little for themselves. It is the searcher and the finder that take the initiative and solve the problem.

That's the gospel. We have a problem and one we created. God solves it, with God paying 100 % of the cost. That's grace.

*Third story. There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me. So he divided his property among **them**.*

In that culture to ask for the inheritance while the father lived was like saying "drop dead I want your money". The older brother wasn't great either. Instead of intervening he let it happen. After all, he might get the full inheritance if the villagers got their hands to the younger son, so great was the insult to his father.

Again, in the context of the culture, what the father does is astounding. And remember Jesus is trying to show us what God is like. He is trying to show us how generous and how gracious God is in his dealings towards us.

In the parable, even after the son basically says, I wish you were dead so I can get your money, the father split the inheritance with both sons and then actually handed it over to the younger son.

There is a whole bunch of stuff there which points to human freedom and God allowing us to go our own way, even when God knows it will end in disaster. We will leave that thought, and simply note that the father in giving the money was damaging his standing and credibility in the community.

It gets worse. The son squanders the inheritance, and finds himself in desperate need. What to do? Vs 18. I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

Now that might sound like this son is coming to his senses. But is he really sorry for the way he has treated the father? Listen carefully to the son's speech. It shows his motive, and again it raises a way of thinking that Jesus has to put right to truly understand the nature of God's love for us.

“Father I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son”. So far, so good. That sounds like he's saying sorry for what he has done.

But the son didn't stop there. The end of his little prepared speech showed his motive and his thinking. *“Make me like one of your hired servants.”* You see, as a hired servant the son has freedom to live in the village, under the protection of the father and he certainly will not be in such need that pig food looks delicious. As a hired servant:

- His needs are met.
- He doesn't need to work on any of the broken relationships.
- He has the opportunity to pay something back to his father.

That's not really being sorry for what he did. That's making the best of a bad situation. All the while thinking he has some control over putting things right.

Again the context of the whole chapter is important. The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin set out to demolish wrong thinking, so a right understanding can be built in the third story.

There are certainly many things I do not know or understand about God. But one thing I do know. God loves me and he loves you. Why? Because he does. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. But we have it. Grace is all about God treating us not as we deserve, but with generosity and kindness, and with, well grace.

Vs 20 the son sets off to find his father. I dare say with his speech all rehearsed. But way before he gets to his father and before he gets chance to utter a word, *his father sees him, is filled with compassion; runs up to his son, put his arms around him and kissed him.*

- The father is quite probably saving the son by getting to him before the villagers.
- The father is again humbling himself, because a person of status and dignity would never run.

Here in the text too we find something wonderful that we would miss if we did not look carefully. That kind of grace, that kind of love, has an effect. It has the potential to change us.

Listen carefully to the sons speech. *'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* End of speech.

- As the father has risked his reputation.
- As the father has humbled himself.
- As the father has saved the son, and at a cost, the son begins to understand how much he is loved.

At that moment he understands that he need not, not can he do anything to put things right except acknowledge what happened. *'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

Vs 22ff *'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.'*

The father is again looking out for the son. He's putting on a feast for the whole town which gives the message, its OK you don't have to act on my insulted honour. Lets party, *"this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"*. Everything is fine.

But is it? vs25 "When the oldest son hears the music and dancing he wants to know what's going on. 'Your brother has come, and your father is celebrating with the village.

Now it was the job of the oldest son to honour the father and wait on the guests. Instead, he refuses to go in. Again the father does the unthinkable and publicly humiliates himself to come out to plead with his oldest son.

The son shows his heart. "I've slaved for you and I don't even get a goat to celebrate with my friends". "When this son of yours comes home "

Disrespect. Self interest. Transactional thinking. Broken relationship. It's all just under the surface. The oldest son, the natural heir, the one who looked great on the outside is exposed. In this story both sons were lost.

In the context of the passage Jesus was faced with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law on the one hand, and the sinners and tax collectors on the other. Which group better understand the love and grace of God? We can work that out for ourselves can't we?

Two points: Firstly, God loves us, and will, in fact, has gone to the most humbling and self effacing measure to show us his love and draw us back into relationship with him. You don't have to look to far to see the gospel in the story.

As the father is humbled, and yes suffers. As the father makes provision for, and in essence saves his lost son, can we see the work of the cross, and what it takes to make us alive again.

Secondly, It's often the unexpected, the so called unacceptable, ones, who understand the graciousness of God, and the way that he works.

It was the younger son who came to understand grace, and a fathers love. When he did, all his plans of making things right in his own power were dropped. As he understood he simply trusted in, and relied on the generosity and grace of the fathers love.

As Jesus was challenging the attitudes and actions of the religious leaders, he may well have been thinking "if only you guys were a bit more like the father in my story".

What of us? And this is where the passage gets really practical. The father did what I would find it very hard to do. He must have known his son was likely to screw things up and yet he gave him freedom. The father also allowed himself to be humiliated as he paid the price to put things right and save his son. Again that's the gospel in a nutshell.

How to make the story practical to us and have it apply to our lives we might ask. We can try to be a bit more like the father in Jesus story.

Two encouragements in the challenge.

- First we have help. We have the Spirit of Jesus. The one who went all the way to the cross for us.
- Second, whenever someone experiences the love and grace of God, most usually through, those who follow God, there is a good chance that that one will be changed for the better.

And even if it appears not much is happening should we take the higher ground, and sometimes these things take time, one thing for sure. Promise! If we show grace to someone at least one person will be changed for the better. The one who acted in grace.

Lets pray, Living God, help us to be gospel people, people of grace. People who prove that you are real, and even more remarkable, you are able to work in, and through us, Amen.