

The Beauty of the Lord

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[0 : 00] And it's very good to see everyone here this morning. And today we are taking a very familiar passage of scripture, which is the story of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15.

And just before we go there, I just want us to maybe just take a look at the background. And then we go into the reading of it.

And the background is that Jesus is here with the Pharisees and the tax collectors and the sinners. And they're listening to Jesus. And the Pharisees, they're murmuring because the tax collectors are there.

And the Pharisees, they had a view of God that saw separation from others as part of their justification before God.

To them, it was all about duty. It was all about doing things. It was all about rules and regulations. And Jesus was here giving the Pharisees a view of God that was not sitting very well with their idea of the kingdom of God.

[1 : 17] Because he was speaking not about self-effort and keeping man-made rules. And this parable that Jesus gives was to show the Pharisees and to show the tax collector and to give us as well a proper view of God.

And really this parable is in three parts. You will notice there in verse 3, it said Jesus told them this parable.

And it starts with part 1, which is the lost sheep in the wilderness. And the shepherd goes off and he leaves the 99 and so on.

We're not going into that today. But that's the first part of this parable. And that really, that story is seen in what we're doing today in part 3.

It's seen in the story of the younger brother going off into the far country, being lost. And then we have part 2 of the woman in the home and the coin is lost.

[2 : 23] And that again is seen in the older brother who stays at home. He doesn't go out to the far country, but he's lost in the home.

And that really is a picture of the Pharisee. They were near God and they classed themselves as being near God at home, almost with God. But they were lost in the home.

And today's sermon is based on part 3 of that parable. It's not 3 parables, it's 1 parable, I believe in it, because it says he told them this parable.

So it's all about the prodigal son and the older brother. And so we take up the reading today in verse 11.

But first of all, we're just going to be still for a minute to ask the Lord to help us all to understand this parable.

[3 : 20] Heavenly Father, we come in Jesus' name today. Lord, our request today, Lord, to you is just to speak to us, all, everyone here, Lord, this morning, including the speaker, Lord, to touch our heart, Lord, with the story before us.

We ask this for your glory in Jesus' name. Amen. So, Jesus said to them, A certain man had two sons.

And the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and he took his journey into a far country, and he wasted his substance on riotous living, which is sinful living.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would have fainted to fill his belly with the food the swine, but no man gave him anything. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough to spare, and I perish with hunger?

[4 : 47] I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Make me as one of your hired servants. And he arose, and he came to his father. And when he was yet a great way off, the father saw him.

And he had compassion on him, and he ran, and he fell on his neck, and he kissed him. And the son said to the father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.

I am not worthy to be called your servant. But the father said to the servant, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it. And let us eat and be merry. For my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found, and they began to be merry.

[5 : 54] Now, his elder son was in the field, and he came and drew near to the house. And he heard the music and the dancing.

And he called one of the servants, and he asked them what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he had received him safe and sound.

And he was angry, and he would not go in. Therefore the father came out and entreated him. And he answered, saying to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve you.

I haven't transgressed. I have kept your commandments. And yet you never gave me a kid, and that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this your son came home, who has devoured his living with harlots, you have killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, you art always with me, and all that I have is yours. It is meet that we should make merry, and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is alive.

[7 : 13] He was lost, and he is found. Now the Lord will bless the reading of his word today. And here we have the story of a father and two sons.

And the younger brother, he wants to, we can, if we have this slide, we'll just click to the first part there. So we have the father and the two sons, and the younger son wants to leave home.

And why did he want to leave home? Well, he wanted to leave home because he felt that he had all this work to do, all this duty to do for his father, and he felt he was missing out on certain things in his life.

To him, they were the good things. They were the enjoyable things. And he heard about the far country out there, and he heard that he had everything, and everything that he wanted in his life.

And he considers his present life to be dull, because he's doing everything out of duty, and he has no pleasure in anything that he's doing. So the young man comes to his father, and he says, I want my inheritance.

[8 : 23] I want what's mine now when you die, what will be mine when you die. An inheritance that would only be given when the father died. And in actual fact, what he's saying in the culture of that day to his father is this, I wish you were dead.

So I want what is mine at your death. I want it now. Give it to me. I want it now. It reminds me of a story that a man told me, an old man told me a story.

He said, I had no son, I had no daughter, and my wife died. And he said, I'm very old. And he said, I had a house.

And he said, I was thinking, who would I leave the house to? And he said, I had only one cousin really that I could leave it to. It was a fifth cousin or something. And he left that house to the fifth cousin.

And he said, I got very sick. And he said, I was practically dying. I was inside in bed. And he said, that fifth cousin walked in with a builder and a measuring tape and started measuring the room I was lying in bed in.

[9 : 34] And he was saying to the builder, and we were to shift that wall, and we're going to do this, and going that. And he said, I really thought, like this fellow, I left the house, has no interest at all in me.

He never asked how I was. So he was very sick, but he recovered. And when he recovered, he went back to a solicitor, and he left the house to a delivery man who you sometimes call in for a cup

of tea and a chat.

And, you know, that's what I almost expect to happen here when I read a story, that the father will say, you're not getting it. I'm going to cut you off. But that's not happened with this father.

He gives him the inheritance while he is still alive. And so the son leaves home, and he has no intention whatsoever of returning. Now, many people leave home for different reasons.

You might get a job in Cork or Dublin. You're going away. You might think you'll be away for six months or whatever. But you'll always leave something behind. You know, whether it is your favorite teddy bear or something or whatever. You'll leave something, and your bed will be there, and you can come back now and then.

[10:42] But this guy, he took everything. He had no intention whatsoever. He was not coming back. When he went, you know, the morning he left, I'm sure the sun was shining in his life so bright that he thought, wow, this is what I want.

I have a life of pleasure ahead, and I have a plentiful supply of money. Look at all the money I have. And he went to the far country, and there he got the pleasure that he sought after.

And that pleasure, it lasted for a while, but it cost him dearly. The Bible says the pleasure of sin is only for a season.

And he wasted everything in that period of time on sinful living. And it cost him everything because he ended up with nothing. And that is the end result of what sin does.

And then there was a famine in the land, and now he couldn't cope. He had nothing. He had no one. Well, you say, what about the friends that he had made?

[11:43] They were nowhere to be found. They did not want him when his money was gone. There is a proverb that says, it's Proverb 18, verse 24, You know, companions may seem very important to us.

You know, having friends, to some people, it's their number one thing. But remember, when you leave God out, as this young man did, it all came to ruin.

And then where were his friends? Where were his companions when he needed them? No one gave him anything. He thought of home at this low point. He had a faultless, loving father.

The father in the story really points us to our heavenly father. And you know, when we think of that proverb, that friend that sticks closer than a brother is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who was telling this parable. And as we listened to this parable this morning, the one who gets us to see these things and the meaning of it is the Holy Spirit this morning.

[13:06] And whatever your story in life is today, whatever your family situation is today, you can know that you have a heavenly father who loves you as the father in this story.

And God is at work in the time of famine. He is at work in your situation today even if you are going through a famine. God is at work through that and you can trust him in it.

And in the time of plenty, this younger brother, he had no thought of the father, but in the time of famine, he came to himself. How important that is to have that moment when we come and we see the father.

He got one blow after another and he came to himself and he said, I have made a mess of my life and I have wronged my father. It's interesting that it's a time when he started to think about God because he said, I have sinned against heaven.

He actually put the sin against God first, even as David did when he was responsible for the death of Uriah, he said, against you and you only have I sinned, he said to God.

[14:20] And this is what this young man did. He realized his sin was ultimately, and his sinful living, was against God. And things were very low in this Jewish boy's life because he got a job feeding swine and he was so hungry that the husks that he was feeding the swine with looked attractive to him.

And you really know when your life has gone bad, when you end up in a pigsty. And that's where he came to himself. And we can maybe change the slide again out to the last one that we have there. He came to himself. He began to see clearly as never before. He began to see the goodness of his father. Just like each of us, we are blinded from seeing the goodness of God.

And it's only through the work of the Holy Spirit that opens our eyes to see the kingdom of God. And he said, I'll go to my father and I'll say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am not worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired hands or your hired servants. And a hired hand really was a person who had no entitlements whatsoever.

[15 : 36] Quite the opposite. The contrast with the son was remarkable because a hired servant only got taken on from day to day. He had no rights, no nothing. And he's saying, make me as a hired servant.

And maybe he thought that he could work his way back. But what he was saying is, I intend to pay back everything that I owe you. I'll pay it back through what I do.

I'll pay it back. And you know, I imagine that he's heading back home now. He said he went back. He's heading back home and he's repeating these words. Father, I'm going to say this.

I'm going to say this. Father, I've sinned against heaven against you. Make me as a hired hand. And he's repeating and he's repeating and he's repeating. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. He's repeating this.

This is, I go over it again. I go over it again. And the father must have been looking out for him because while he's still a far way off, the father sees him. And what's the father's reaction?

[16 : 35] Well, I kind of take it that would be like, you know, he locked the door and he'd say, I'm going to sit in here and this better be good. This better be good.

But that's not the father's reaction at all. His love for the son causes him to start running. And in the culture of the day, that was not what a man did because they had loose toes and they have to bare their legs to run.

It was maybe children would run but not fathers. So, it was seen as a sign of lowering yourself. And here the father is running. And we see the father, when he saw him, he's full of compassion for him. And that caused the father to run and to fall on his neck and to kiss him. And the son delivers the words. Here are the words that he'd practice. Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am not worthy to be called your son. But he never finished what he had practiced, what he had said he would say. He never got there. He never got to the end of it, what he had refailed.

[17 : 42] He left out, he never said, make me as one of your hired servants. The question is, why didn't he finish it? Why didn't he say it?

Before he could say it, before he got to the last line, make me as one of your hired servants. The line he never said. The father had already said to the servant, bring the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.

And the ring was a sign of the family belonging. It was, watch it, put your ring on the ink and stamp it on the certificate or whatever.

That was the sign that he was a son. He couldn't say, make me as one of your hired servants.

That's already done by the father. The father said, let's celebrate, bring out the faggot calf.

My son who was dead is alive. He was lost. He is found. The younger son, he had squandered everything he had. He had nothing. But in having nothing, he became the possessor of everything.

[18 : 50] That's what God does. And you know, the putting on the robe, I think, really pictures for us what God has done for us in Christ. We remember it this morning in the breaking of the bread.

We have put, the robe of righteousness has been put on us. And we're told to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh because we have been changed by Christ.

And we're no longer living to the flesh. And that's what happened to this man. He was living a sinful life. He did dirty robes on the pigsty. But the Father put on that new robe of righteousness on him.

Something marvelous had happened here. And what the Father did for him, it speaks and reminds us of what God has done for us in Christ. You know, the Father says he was dead and he's alive.

And that's what God says in his word about us. We've only, you have to look at Ephesians chapter 2. It says that, and you he has made alive who are dead. That's each one of us as believers.

[19 : 53] God has made us alive, spiritually alive in Christ. In Ephesians, it says that, and I'll just read it, that you he have made alive who are dead in your trespasses and sins.

And it goes on to say, God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherein he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, had quickened us together with Christ. By grace he saved and has raised us up together to sit together in heavenly places in Christ.

That's our position. He's made us to sit in heavenly places with Christ. What an amazing thing that is. That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in the kindness he has towards us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man shall boast. For ye are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good

works, which God had before ordained that we walk in him.

All the way along, the son had the wrong idea. It was all about duty, what he did. It was boring. It was this. Now, he begins to see it's all about beauty.

[21 : 12] It's all about what God has done. It's all about grace. It's no longer the duty first. It's the beauty first. And, you know, the story is our story of what God has done for us.

And when we come to him and confess our sin and put our faith and trust in what Christ has done for us, it's all about grasping and beholding the beauty of the Lord.

And the word behold, that I gave as a title for this message today, really means observing something remarkable. Something remarkable has happened here.

Something remarkable has happened when the Holy Spirit brought you to see the beauty that is in Christ. It's truly remarkable what God has done for us.

I haven't a slide for this, but this was part of the reading today. It's the older brother. He heard the noise. He heard the celebration. And when he is told that his brother has arrived and he's safe and well, he is angry.

[22 : 26] He's cross. And he tells the father that he's angry in verse 29. And he says, all these years, I have slaved for you and you never even gave me a kid for a party and for a celebration.

He's angry because he sees no beauty in what happened. All these years, I have slaved for you. For him, it was all about duty. It was all about what he did and was not about the beauty.

And he walked and he felt he deserved something back. I'm going to turn in a second to Luke chapter 18 and verse 10.

Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee. This is the story Jesus was telling. One was a Pharisee and one was a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed just for himself. God, I thank you that I am not as other men are an extortionist, unjust, adulterer and not as this tax collector.

[23 : 35] I fast twice a week. I give tithes and all that I possess. But the public and the tax collector standing afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven but smote his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other because everyone that exalts himself will be abased but he that humble himself shall be exalted.

And that was the problem with the older brother. He said, you know, you gave me nothing. You gave me nothing. When things go wrong in our life and things do go wrong in our life and we come across really severe problems in our life, the danger there sometimes is that we begin to think like the older brother.

You might think, I don't deserve this. but let us remember that if you can't understand what's going on and what you're going through, remember that you got something that you didn't deserve.

I've had a, I suppose, the last number of weeks have been quite tough weeks for me and I was thinking of the, of this parable and I was thinking about the older brother and I found it very helpful to make sense of what I was going through.

[25 : 20] And, you know, he said he got nothing. He was kind of saying to the father, you gave me nothing compared to what you gave him. But that was absolutely, totally false because when the father, when the father divided the inheritance between the two of them, he divided it into three.

And why did he divide it into three? Because the oldest son who's complaining, he got two parts because that was always in the culture of the day. The oldest son got the bigger share. So he got the bigger share and, you know, he got his keep, he got his food and in fact, the father said, all that I have is yours.

I've given everything to you. But he never saw the beauty of what the father had given him and how tragic that was. And no matter what we're going through in our circumstances, the one thing to keep your eye on is to behold the beauty, the remarkable beauty of what God has done for you.

And somehow your circumstance will suddenly fade that little bit. But the brightness of God will carry you through and the beauty of God will carry you through the difficult circumstances that you face.

You'll actually see the victory to a certain extent but you're still faced with the problems you face. But you see it in a different light. behold the beauty of the Lord this morning is grasping what God has done for us in such a way that it works out in our circumstances in life.

[27 : 02] Now I think to do that it's really the help of the Holy Spirit in your life that will really do that for you. but you can come in prayer and you can ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit in the difficulty that you're facing.

You know everything in this parable is called the lost parable is supposed to be the right title for it because everything and everyone in this parable is lost. It started off with the sheep being lost then the coin is lost the younger brother is lost but the good news is they're all found but bar one the one who saw it the other way around who put the duty above the beauty of the Lord.

And we're going to finish finally in a psalm and just one verse that to me kind of summed up the message today for you and for me is Psalm 27.

and verse number four. And David says here in verse four One thing have I desired of the Lord and that will I seek after that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

I'm going to stop there. This was his desire. To be in the place of the Lord all the days of his life. That was his desire.

[28 : 41] But why was it his desire? Was it his desire to be in the house of the Lord? Was it his desire to be in to really feel good?

People would chat with him and all this. You know was that his desire? Sometimes we come to church and we feel if we come to church we've kind of done our duty. You know we've been to church and you know when I was going through this difficult time you know I wanted to be able to go to a Bible study and I couldn't you know I was kind of saying I felt bad because I couldn't go but yet my circumstances wouldn't allow me to go but you know was it was I sad because I was missing the duty of going but I hope it wasn't I hope because the beauty of going was that I was missing but David here says the one thing he desired the one thing he's asking I'm seeking after he's seeking he's asking God in prayer for this that he would dwell in the house of the Lord but it's not just for the sake of dwelling in the house of the Lord when we read on we see the reason he wants to be in the house of the Lord is what?

to behold the beauty of the Lord that's it I mean when we sung some of the hymns this morning that really came out it's the worship of God it's really seeing God there is a vast richness and worship within us that the Holy Spirit leads us into and really that's a wonderful thing that we can see in this story today that the Lord really is so marvelous so beautiful amazing grace how amazing grace is that our chains are gone we're free and we can look at him and not our circumstances because God is working in the difficulty and he's doing a mighty work in that too so let us praise God and look to God in the difficulty not to the difficulty Amen so heavenly father we just thank you for these words Lord we just pray that they would Lord touch each heart here that we go forward Lord and we would behold your beauty and we would see you every day and look for your beauty in everything Lord we think of you in our thoughts of you we thank you Lord for the beautiful work you've done in each of our lives Lord and Lord we pray Lord for just to to get this picture this morning and to Lord our lives to be changed and to go forth with a vigour for you and a freshness for you Lord because we're no longer dead we're alive and Lord that you were telling us this morning to go on to live in the goodness of the place that you've placed us in that richness in Christ we give it glory in his name Amen