

# Scandalous Love

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Today and next Sunday, we have the great privilege of listening to Jesus of Nazareth as he tells what many people consider to be the greatest story ever told.

It is recorded for us by Luke the physician in the 15th chapter of the gospel that bears his name. Luke 15, for many people, is the gospel within the gospel, and rightly so.

For in Luke 15, we have the good news in its purest form, so to speak, especially in the parable usually called the prodigal son, which we will discover should be called the prodigal sons, and which we will discover might be more accurately called the prodigal father.

Now, many of us in this room have heard this parable many times, and yet like me, you long to hear it again and again and again. Many preachers have preached this parable many times, but like me, you long to preach it again and again and again.

Some of you might have been here 12 years ago when I tried to preach this as a guest preacher, and many of you will be here next year when I preach it again. I would love to preach this every year at least once a year.

[ 1 : 3 8 ] Someday, we are really going to believe what Jesus is teaching us in this parable. Someday, we're really going to believe it.

Now, the parable, the story, has redemptive effect in any cultural setting. Canadian, British, American, Mexican, Brazilian, South African, Asian.

But the story really comes alive and does its redemptive work when it is heard in the original context in which Jesus first told it. When it is heard in its Middle Eastern cultural context.

If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of incredibly good, good news. Luke 15, verses 1-2 and then verses 11-24.

Now, all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Jesus to listen to him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

[ 2 : 5 3 ] So, he told them this parable, saying, A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.

So, the father divided his wealth between them. 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.

Now, when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country. And he began to be impoverished. 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.

And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating. And no one was giving him anything. But when he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread?

But I'm dying here with hunger. I will get up, and I will go to my father. And I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

[ 4 : 00 ]     Make me as one of your hired men. 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.

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. But the father said to the slaves, Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet and bring the fattened calf to kill it.

Let us eat and celebrate, 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. This is the word of the Lord.

You may be seated. Living God, we believe that you helped Luke accurately write down these wonderful words of Jesus.

And now, in your mercy and grace, I pray that you would help us enter into the reality of which they speak as never before, for we pray it in Jesus' name.

[ 5 : 15 ]     Amen. Whenever we read Jesus' story, we need to remember that Jesus spoke it to Pharisees and scribes.

It was not spoken to the crowds. It was spoken to Pharisees and scribes. And we need to remember that Jesus told the story to justify behavior the scribes and Pharisees judged to be scandalous.

To justify actions of Jesus that the Pharisees and scribes judged to be shameful. I'm going to say all that again.

Whenever we read Jesus' story, we need to remember that he tells it to the scribes and the Pharisees. And he tells it to justify behavior on his part that the scribes and Pharisees judged to be scandalous.

That they judged to be shameful. Well, let's walk through the story. Let's make sure we understand the characters and understand what is going on here.

[ 6 : 29 ]     Who are the scribes and Pharisees with whom Jesus is regularly in conflict? In trouble. The scribes are the professional theologians of the day.

If you will, they are the seminary professors and the ecclesiastical lawyers. They're the bishops and the district superintendents. And they were entrusted with the task of teaching and protecting God's law and all the oral tradition around that law.

And it was incumbent upon their office to interrogate Jesus of Nazareth about his teaching. The Pharisees are the lay leaders of the day.

They are the deacons and the elders. They're the Sunday school teachers. They're the chairpersons of the committees. And they were committed to keeping and obeying the law of God and all 631 other rules and regulations built around the original Ten Commandments.

Now, although the scribes and Pharisees get rather bad press in the Gospels, we must not quickly dismiss them. They are well motivated.

[ 7 : 33 ]     They wanted to be holy. They wanted to be pleasing to God. And they wanted to help other people be holy. The problem was their concept of holiness.

For them, holiness meant conformity to the rules. One achieves holiness by keeping rules and regulations. They missed the point. Holiness cannot be legislated.

Holiness comes from relationship. Relationship with the Holy One. And that relationship cannot be initiated nor sustained by keeping rules and regulations only.

Now, here's the critical fact for us to keep in mind as we read Jesus' story. The scribes and Pharisees thought of themselves as the protectors of Israel's law and therefore the protectors of the reputation of Israel's God.

And as far as they're concerned, Jesus of Nazareth is shaming that reputation. In the way he is behaving and acting, Jesus is shaming the reputation of Israel's law and shaming the reputation of Israel's God.

[ 8 : 42 ] At issue for the scribes and Pharisees is the character of the Holy God. Now, who are the tax collectors and the sinners with whom Jesus seems to always be in company?

The tax collectors are Jews who are working for the Roman government. They have been given the right to collect taxes in a particular area and they can collect just about any tax they want as long as they deliver the money to the Roman Empire they agree to deliver.

That means, therefore, that these Jews are ripping off their fellow Jews. The word sinner is the Pharisee's word.

You might know that in the Gospels, Jesus never addresses a human being as sinner. This word refers to those who have broken the law and such people are then considered unclean.

They were ostracized by those who thought they kept the law. Sinners and tax collectors flocked to Jesus. That's an understatement.

[ 9 : 50 ] They could tell that there was something different about this new rabbi and they wanted to be near Jesus. And scandal of scandals, Jesus wanted to be near them.

Luke says that Jesus received them, welcomed them. And this word that's used here means to receive a person as a member of the family, to welcome someone as a member of the family.

Jesus' welcoming tax collectors and sinners as members of his own family. But what was really shameful and scandalous for the scribes and Pharisees is that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors.

He ate with them. In the Middle East, eating with someone means a whole lot more than it does in our time. To eat a meal with someone in the Middle East is an almost sacramental act and it signifies total acceptance.

Total acceptance. Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners and thereby totally accepting them. Scandal of scandals.

[ 10 : 58 ] This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. It's said with disgust and anger. Jesus of Nazareth is shaming the reputation of Israel's law and he is shaming the reputation of Israel's God.

Shame on you, Jesus. Now, Jesus responds to these accusations by telling three parables that are recorded in Luke 15.

They are often called the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. And that's too bad because the subject of the story is not what or who is lost, but whose is lost.

The emphasis is not on the lost sheep, but on the shepherd. Not on the lost coin, but on the woman. And not on the lost sons, but on the father. And here's the most important thing to remember.

Through these parables, Jesus is painting a portrait. He's painting a portrait of the holy God whose reputation, scribes and Pharisees, are so zealous to protect.

[ 12 : 06 ] He is the incarnate God who can say to us, they who have seen me have seen the father. And now he's going to paint a picture of what he knows about the father. And he ought to know what he's doing because he has lived in the father's heart.

He comes out of the father's heart. And now he gives us this picture of the father's heart and thereby draws us into that heart. Which is why these parables have had such powerful effect on people's lives in any cultural setting.

In the feelings of the shepherd for his sheep and his actions toward the sheep, in the feelings of the woman toward her coin and her actions toward those coins, in the feeling of the father for his sons and action toward the sons, we discover who the living, holy God is.

This is so important to keep in mind. The subject of these stories is the holy one whose reputation the scribes and Pharisees want to protect.

Okay, so far? Setting the stage okay? Give me a nod. Yes? Yes? Now, it turns out that through these stories, Jesus makes it worse for himself.

[ 13 : 23 ] because the stories now heighten the scandal. He's going to make it even more shameful. Let me show you.

Luke 15, verse 11. There was a man who had two sons. Two sons. This tells us that we're going to miss the point of the story unless we also work with a second son, which we'll do next week.

The fact is, this parable is told for the benefit of the second son. Both sons, it turns out, leave their father. The first son, by going to the far country, the second son, while staying at home.

The younger son says to his father, verse 12, Father, give me the share of the estate that will befall me. What a cruel thing to say. It's as though he were saying, Father, let's just pretend that you've died.

And now you give me what will be mine when you do die. Dr. Kenneth Bailey, Presbyterian theologian, missionary, lived most of his life in the Middle East, mostly in Syria and Lebanon.

[ 14 : 31 ] And in his book, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, he points out that such a request never would be heard in that culture. Indeed, it's unimaginable.

He says that he's gone through villages throughout the Middle East and he asked these villagers, has anyone in your village ever asked this question, Father, give me what's going to come to me when you die? No.

No one would ask that. Well, why wouldn't they ask that? Well, because it means that the boy wants his father to die. Well, if the boy asked that, what would the father do?

Well, he would beat his son, of course. I checked that out when I've had time in the Middle East. I checked that out in the Philippines, up with the Ifagal people in the northern part of the island of Luzon and I asked them, have you ever heard any of your children ever ask this question?

No. Why not? Well, because it means that the boy wants his dad to die. And what happens if he were to ask that question? Why the father would beat him, of course. It's because in asking that question, this boy is shaming his father.

[ 15 : 40 ] What a self-centered, demanding, rebellious, ungrateful kid. Give me. Give me is the keynote of his conversation in this relationship.

Give me my share of the estate. Now, here we discover something about the nature of sin. Sin is not breaking the rules, although that's involved in it.

Sin is breaking a relationship. At the beginning of the story, the son has not broken any rules, but he has broken his father's heart.

It turns out that the second son who stays home also breaks his father's heart at an even deeper level. Now, how does this father respond to the younger son's request?

In a surprising way. At the beginning of many surprises. As the Middle Eastern villagers told Kenneth Bailey, the father is expected to beat the son.

- [ 16 : 41 ] But what does this father Jesus is portraying do? Surprise, he grants the request. Verse 12, he divides his wealth between them, Jesus says. The father gives the son one-third of the family wealth.

One-third. Do the math. One-third. That's a lot. And he lets the son go. Which tells us something about the love of God.

God. The love of God is not possessive. The love of God gives us the freedom not to be loved, not to choose to be loved. And there are times when God lets us have our way.

There's another surprise in the father's response. At this point in the story, the Middle Easterners expect the father to at least say something like, okay, go, but you are no longer my son.

Some of you may have heard that speech. Okay, go. Just go. But you're no longer my son.

- [ 17 : 45 ] But this father does not say that. And in so doing, he is choosing to suffer even more deeply. He is opening himself up to even greater pain.

Now remember, Jesus is painting a portrait of the living God whose reputation the scribes and Pharisees are so anxious to protect. Jesus says the younger son gathers together all that he has to go off to the far country.

The word translated gathered together in verse 13 could actually be translated turned into cash. He has to liquidate all these assets so that he can travel quickly.

So he goes from house to house, shop to shop, selling his father's stock in Bethlehem steel, in Arabian oil, in Dead Sea fish relationships and jerusalem.com. Now notice that the son does this quickly.

Verse 13, not many days from now, says Jesus. The reason for the haste is not simply to get on with the journey. Rather, as Kenneth Bailey suggests, as he goes from perspective buyer to buyer, the intensity of the community hatred and disgust mounts.

- [ 18 : 54 ] At every turn, he's greeted with amazement and horror and rejection. Shame on you, shame on you, shame on you. And he needs to leave town to protect himself. Now this part of the cultural setting will come back at a crucial turning point in the story.

The son leaves, he goes off to the far country, far from his people, and he squanders his wealth in loose living or expensive living. That's a biblical euphemism for wine, women, and song.

He lives high on the hog, although as a Jewish boy he probably would not have put it just that way. The son lives so loosely, so loosely, that he loses one-third of the family's wealth.

Hmm. Then a famine hits. Thank God that it does not go well in the far country. Thank God, thank God that when God lets us have our way, it does not go well.

When the son had lots of money, he had a lot of friends. When he had no money, no friends. And he began to be in need. Now why not go home? He eventually does go home. But why not go home right at that point when he's experiencing hunger?

- [ 20 : 09 ] Because he's afraid to go home. Why is he afraid to go home? Well for one thing, he's afraid that he's going to meet the taunting and jesting of the villagers as he comes to the village gate.

Ha ha ha, you. You went off to find your life and look at you. You lost everything. You're dirty. You're no good anymore. And he cannot at that point contemplate accepting such shame.

In the Philippines, I was visiting with a Filipino man who had moved from a beautiful part of the country into Manila, hoping to find a new job and a better way of life.

And he discovered the opposite has often happened. And I said to him, why don't you just go home? Go home to your beautiful village. He couldn't answer me. He never answered me. Later on, one of his friends came to me, he says, he can't answer you because he's ashamed.

I said, what? He says, because he's going to go home, having left the village, and not have anything left. And he's going to have to suffer the shame of the village. So he'll stay in Manila.

[ 21 : 09 ] Furthermore, the younger son does not want to go home because he's afraid he's going to encounter the hostility and anger of the elders of the village. They might beat him because he had shamed his father.

They might make life so miserable for him that he will starve. Furthermore, he does not make the choice to go home at this particular time because he fears the scorn of his older brother.

The older brother might say, you lousy, good-for-nothing bum. You wasted one-third of the family wealth, and you have no right to be here. I'm the oldest of five sons, and I can imagine giving that talk to my younger brother.

Or the older brother might have some mercy and say, you blew it, dude. You go get that money back, and when you do, maybe you can come home.

I often wonder, how many younger siblings do not come home because of the attitude of the older siblings? Scribes and Pharisees, if they let you come home at all, demand that you first measure up.

[ 22 : 15 ] The younger brother will endure the famine before facing such scorn from his brother. There's yet another reason why the boy is afraid to go home at this point.

It is his father. He's afraid of his father. He fully expects the anger and the scorn and the punishment and the rejection of the father. And the father has every right to so act.

He has every right to forget his son. He has every right to say to his son, you made your bed, now you just sleep in it. So the son chooses to stay in the far country.

Jesus says he goes to one of the citizens of that land, likely a Gentile, verse 15, looking for work. Now here's an interesting point to note. The word translated hired in verse 15 literally means he glued himself.

It's a picture of sheer desperation. He's forcing himself on that Gentile person. I'll do anything. And it's very likely that this Gentile person doesn't want this kid there and so he offers a job he's sure a Jewish boy will reject.

[ 23 : 27 ] Sure kid, you go feed the pigs. The pigs are the garbage collectors of any society. Yet the son would rather do that job than go home.

The situation continues to worsen. He would gladly have eaten anything anybody gave them but no one gave him anything to eat, not even what the pigs were eating.

Then Jesus says, the son comes to his senses, verse 17. How many of my father's hired men have enough bread to eat and I'm sitting here starving to death?

Now, here's the question. What makes this younger boy come to his senses? Well, partly it's his need, right? But mostly it's something deeper and it was Dale Bruner who taught at Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines who helped me see this deeper reason.

What brought this little boy, this young boy to his senses is the memory of his father. The memory of the father. He remembers the goodness of his father.

[ 24 : 36 ] How many of my father's hired men have more than enough food to eat? He remembers how generous his father is to his employers, to his servants.

When I read this section, I pray that my children will remember me as a generous father. So the younger son reasons to himself, what am I doing here?

I'll get up and I'll go home and I'll ask to be hired as one of his men who eat well. I'll face the taunting and the scorn. I'll face the anger of my brother, but at least I won't be starving.

So off he goes, ragged, weary, needing a bath, all of his inheritance squandered. As he walks home, he puts together a speech.

Verses 18 and 19. He has a speech and it has three parts. And I can imagine him practicing this over and over again as he walks home.

[ 25 : 39 ] I remember that day when I was 17 years old and I overturned my father's pickup truck. I and two of my buddies were horsing around on a gravel road and we flipped that thing.

I can still remember that speech. I won't give it to you, but it was about a 10-mile ride home and I went over that speech again and again and again.

My father didn't believe me, the speech, but anyway. So this young boy has three parts to his speech. Part one, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.

Part one is his confession of sin. He knows that what he has done is shameful, it's wrong, it's sinful. Part two, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

Part two is his affirmation of the consequences of sin. He knows that he has shamed the father and the family and the village. He knows he's broken the relationship. He knows he has no claim to sonship.

[ 26 : 48 ] Part three, make me as one of your hired men. Part three is his attempt to make up for his sin, his attempt to pay off his debt. So review the speech.

Has how many parts? Three parts. Part one, Father, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight. Part two, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Part three, make me to be one of your hired men. Over and over and over again. Father, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

Make me to be one of your hired servants. Father, I've sinned against heaven and your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me to be one of your hired servants. And he heads home. Now, we come to the heart of the story.

Remember why Jesus is telling it. He is justifying and interpreting actions which the scribes and Pharisees consider to be scandalous. And at this point, I can imagine the scribes and Pharisees listening very carefully.

[ 27 : 48 ] Jesus says, verse 20, But while the son was a long way off, yes, Jesus, while the son was a long way off, his father saw him.

Surprise! Everyone in that day expected the father to have forgotten the son and to have lost himself in his business. But not this father. This father, this father has been longing for his son, looking and waiting for his son, which is why the great preacher, German preacher, Helmut Thielicke, entitles his work on the parables The Waiting Father.

What a picture of the holy God Jesus is painting. While the son was a long way off, the father saw him. The father has been waiting for him. Do you see this?

Can you see him watching for you and waiting for you? Do you see him watching and waiting for your children and grandchildren who may be in the far country? Can you see him watching and waiting for your neighbors to come home?

Jesus continues, verse 20, And the father felt compassion for him. Another surprise. Everyone in that day expects the scorn and disgust and indignation of the father.

[ 29 : 09 ] The kid blew it. He just wouldn't listen. He just never listened to me. He had to have his own way, so go have your own way.

But no, not this father. This father. This father is filled with compassion. The word that Luke uses here is the word that refers to the inner parts, to the guts, to the splachnah.

The father is deeply moved, ripped up in his guts for his son. What a picture. Jesus is painting of the holy God, the suffering father. Jesus continues, verse 20, And the father ran to the son.

Another surprise. The father ran in the Middle East or Asia. A father of, a man of the father's age and statue never runs in public for any reason.

Sonia Matthews, who's on our staff, is from India. And she sent me an email during the week because she's been looking at this parable. And Sonia says, she read that part about the father running. She says, that would never, ever happen in India.

[ 30 : 15 ] It'll never, ever happen in the Middle East. It's a shameful thing for a man of his stature to run because he has to lift the hem of his robe, thereby exposing his undergarments, which is a very shameful act.

The father ran. Literally, he raced. The father races toward his son. What a picture of the holy God Jesus is painting here. The running father who's running after you and running after your children and running after your grandchildren and running after your neighbors.

Now, why run? Well, partly because he wants his son to come home and he wants to love him. But here's where the culture comes to place. The father runs because the father knows what this younger son is going to face when he gets to the village gates.

He knows that the son is going to face the heckling and humiliation of the villagers and he knows that some of the elders and maybe the older son will want to beat him. And so, the father runs to head all that off.

Wow, a shameful act. And what a story. Jesus continues, verse 20, and the father embraced him and threw his arms around him and kissed him.

[ 31 : 31 ] Literally, it is, he kept kissing him in public. What a scandalous picture Jesus is painting of the holy God.

The father should have stayed back in the house. The father should have remained distant at the homecoming of this boy who shamed the father's name and the family's name and the village's name and who squandered one-third of the family wealth.

But Jesus knows a different kind of father. This father has been waiting and longing and suffering and when he sees his son, he runs to him, throws his arms around him and kisses him filthy though he may be.

And get this, by that act, by kissing his son in public, the father takes upon himself all the shame of that son.

The father is now, by that act, transferring all the shame of the boy onto himself. And now, whatever it was that the villagers, the elders, and the older son wanted to do to the young boy, they have to do to his father.

[ 32 : 44 ] Wow. While stunned by this surprising, scandalous love, the son gives his speech. How many parts does it have? Three parts.

Three parts. The son begins, verse 21, Father, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight. The father lets him speak that speech and the father will let us speak it. We have to come clear. We need to confess.

The son continues, part two, verse 21, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. And the father lets him speak this too because he needs to name the reality that he understands how damaging his actions have been that he broke the relationship.



And then there's a third part. What's the third part of the speech? Make me as one of your hired servants. So the son takes a deep breath, prepares to say the words, but before he can give part three, a further surprise takes place.

The father interrupts the son's speech with his own speech. Do you see that? He's prepared to give three parts of the speech, but before he can give the third one, the father interrupts him with his own speech.

[ 33 : 57 ] Brothers and sisters, that interruption is the gospel. The father cut off part three. He will not hear it. We can say it till the cows come home.

We can repeat it again and again, but the father will not hear it. It is totally irrelevant. God will not let us try to make up for what we have done. He will not let us try to pay the debt.

Besides, what could we pay? God will not let us try to earn our way into his family. Oh, we do it all the time. We do it all the time.

We do good deeds. We do religious ritual, or we wallow in guilt long enough so we think that the father's pleased with us now. The father interrupts the son before he can give part three because there's nothing the son can do but come home.

That's all he has to do is turn around and come home. Now, as I said, part three of the son's speech is interrupted by the father's speech, and the father's speech is full of more surprises.

[ 35 : 02 ] Everyone expects the father to say, at least, well, go get a shower, kid, and put on some decent clothes. Not this father. Verse 22, quick, bring the best robe and put it on him.

The best robe? The best robe is the father's robe. The prodigal son is going to go through the village gates wearing his father's robe. Oh, what a scandalous picture.

Jesus is painting of a holy God, a God who dresses sinners in his own holiness. He comes and he puts his robe over my rags. He puts his holiness over my unholiness.

Oh, I love to tell the story. It will be my theme in glory. There's another surprise. Quick, put a ring on his finger.

A ring on his finger? The ring on the finger is the so-called signet ring. This is the ring the father uses for stamping his official documents. My goodness. The son squandered one-third of the family's wealth and he's given authority to manage what's left of the wealth.

[ 36 : 10 ] What is this? Sinners are going to be leaders in the kingdom of God? Tax collectors are going to manage the treasury of the household of God? There's more.

Another surprise. Quick, put sandals on his feet. You see, slaves went barefoot. Children wore shoes. And another surprise. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.

The fattened calf is reserved for the most special guest. The highest honor to be paid in the Middle East is when you come to the house and you get the fattened calf.

That says you are a high-standing guest. Sinners and tax collectors worthy of butchering the fattened calf. Honored guests at the meal of a holy one.

There's more. There's yet another surprise. Quick, quick, let us have a feast and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and is alive. He was lost and found. Here Jesus reveals the rejoicing father, the feast-making father who loves to party when his children come home.

[ 37 : 16 ] Everything, everything, I mean that word totally, everything, everything, everything the father does in this parable is unexpected and culturally scandalous.

Everything he does. Just as the way Jesus relates to sinners and tax collectors is scandalous and religiously shameful.

And Jesus defends his scandalous action by the even more scandalous claim that in him, the holy one, God the father, is welcoming sinners and eating with them.

In Jesus, the holy God embraces sinners. It's the embrace that makes us holy. Do you believe that? It's the embrace. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

It's the grace of the one who only acts in a way that honors his name. So here's the gospel. The good news, I believe, every person on this planet is longing to hear.

[ 38 : 22 ] In the incarnation, the living and holy God lifts the hem of his robe and runs towards sons and daughters. At the cross, the living and holy God takes upon himself all the shame of all the sinners of history and he rejoices when he does it.

So what if some religious folk think that God is thereby tarnishing his name? All that matters is that lost sons and daughters have come home. And besides, Jesus is not tarnishing God's name.

For the first time in history, God's name is finally being revealed. For God's name, the name that God wants in the world is this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

brothers and sisters, it's safe to come home. It matters not what you have done or not done. It matters not what you have done or not done since the last time you heard this story.

You just come home. Just turn around and come home. Oh, sure, sure, sure, sure. Sure, sure, sure. Some of the older brothers and sisters, they're going to make you want to measure up first. Sure.

[ 39 : 35 ] They're going to demand that you measure up. But that's because they do not know what Jesus knows about the Father. And besides, the only opinion that matters is the Father's.

And the only begotten of God, the Son of God, is telling us that it is safe to come home and He ought to know because He has lived from all eternity in that heart.

Why do you think the Son, the storyteller, dies in the posture that He does? Arms outstretched. Because that is the posture of the Father's heart.

The outstretched arms of the storyteller are the outstretched arms of the prodigal father. I tell you, I tell you, it is safe to come home.

You will be welcomed with scandalous love. As you come home this morning, just listen as Grace and the team sing over us.

[ 40 : 47 ] . . . .

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