

Welcome Home

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[0 : 0 0] of the prodigal son. We read again at verse 17, where the younger brother, having gone into a far-off country, has lost everything he had. And then in verse 17, it says, that 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. I will arise and go to my father and 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 as one of your hired servants. What's your expectations as you come to church today or any day as you come to church?

Do you come with any kind of expectations? Do you come in anticipation of going to worship? Or who are you going to worship? Do you anticipate and have a sense of expectation and meeting with God? And what is your maybe expectation of meeting with God? What do you expect from him? Perhaps you come, I hope many of you do, with an expectation of meeting with him through his word in a way that you're blessed, you're encouraged, you're strengthened for the week ahead. As God's people, as those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we should come with that expectation. But perhaps some of you come with a different kind of expectation, maybe with no expectation at all. You come out of habit and routine and maybe there's no expectation of meeting with God. Maybe your expectation is just to come and to go. Or an expectation of even if I do meet with God, he's someone who wouldn't accept me because of who I am.

Because of what I've done. These are the kind of expectations that we can maybe have in our hearts at times as well. As we turn to this parable of the prodigal son, we find the younger brother, as Jesus speaks of here, an expectation of going back to his father, almost you could say with his tail between his legs. Having asked for much from his father and having lost everything, he's now come to himself and he said, I'll go back. But what's his expectation? He says there, don't treat me as your son. Just treat me like a servant because I'm not worthy of anything else. Why is Jesus using this parable, this story? What's the purpose behind it? Well, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, when you see the context of this parable being told, it's a mixture of people who have gathered together with their own expectations of what Jesus is going to say to them. We have tax collectors and sinners drawing near to him. Those who are seen by the Pharisees as outcasts. Those who probably shouldn't even be in the presence of Jesus shouldn't even be in the presence of Jesus. And the Pharisees, those who think they're good people and deserving to hear from Jesus, deserving as good people even to criticize Jesus and condemn Jesus for what he's saying, they have no expectation themselves of what

Jesus is going to say. But they're grumbling and saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. And that's the context we see this parable being told. So there's a double-sided expectation or double-sided reason for this story. It's to teach the Pharisees about who deserves the gospel and it's to teach tax collectors and sinners that the gospel is for all. Storytelling is a bit of a dying art. It's not as prominent now even as it used to be in our own society when people would be gathered together in a home to tell a story together, to share a story together. Many of the people who were good at doing these things have passed on now. And we're getting more familiar with a different kind of communication where we sit and look at a box in the corner. We just switch off and just almost don't even hear what the television is saying to us. It's a different kind of storytelling. But as you come to the scriptures, you find that Jesus was the greatest storyteller ever. And he used stories, or as we see them called parables, to explain to people the world they lived in, the kind of people they were, and explain to them what they needed to hear from him, explain to them their need of the gospel through these parables. They were stories that people could relate to. They could see what Jesus was saying. They could understand it. But very often in the parable, there was a twist to the tale, something that they didn't expect in the story, an outcome that they didn't

expect. And that's what we see in the parable of the prodigal son. We'll come to that more in a moment. But if you hear the story of the prodigal son, I'm sure it's a story many of you will be familiar with, a story about a father and his two sons. And as you hear the story, perhaps your immediate thought goes towards the younger brother, the one who's always known as the prodigal son, because we feel that he's maybe the main character in this story. But there's other characters in this story as well. And if you think, who is the main character in this parable that Jesus is saying? It's not the younger brother.

It's not the older brother. But it's the father. He is the main character in this story. And the way he responds to both his sons. Now, we're not going to look at the older brother this morning, but today, but we're going to focus more on the younger brother. But you see as you read on, the way he responds to the older brother as well, he does so in love and grace.

[6 : 32] So the father is the main character. We know the prodigal son, but do we know the prodigal God?

The father in this story. A father who welcomes his son home. Jesus is here explaining about his own father, God, who welcomes sinners to himself, who welcomes all who will come to him in repentance.

There is a welcome for all who come to him. He doesn't turn anyone away. So whatever your expectations of him today, remember as you read and as you go through this parable of the prodigal son, that God may be different to what you expect. He may receive you in a different way to what you expect, but you have to come to him in repentance. So we're going to look at the younger son in particular, but also the father too. And the first thing I want to see from this parable is the request of the younger brother and the recklessness of his life.

Many of us can relate to the younger brother. I'm sure there's an element of the younger brother in all of us. He's like many since the time Jesus told this parable. To this very day, people have been brought up, you could almost say in a church setting and with a good upbringing, blessed in their homes, blessed in their communities. They had everything. Just like we could say the same, we've had a good upbringing, many of us I'm sure. We've enjoyed many blessings and privileges. But many of us at some point in our lives have often come to a point where we say, I want to do my own thing. I don't want to have to listen to somebody else telling me what to do all the time. I want to do things in my own way. If you've ever watched the film Braveheart, there's a word used often in that film by Mel Gibson as he acts out William Wallace.

[8 : 58] And there's a word that you hear others repeating as well. The word is freedom. So they're crying out for that they would have their freedom to be able to do things their own way.

Well, that's what the younger brother here is crying out as well. He's crying, I want my freedom. I want to be free from the shackles of being at home with his father. I want to be free from doing everything that he tells me to do, to doing things in his own way. He wants to be his own boss, do his own thing. Have you gone through that experience yourself? I know I did. I wanted just to get away.

Away from the island. Away from home. Just do things in my own way. Not have to listen to somebody else telling me what to do. He wants to be his own boss. And you see that with his request in verse 12.

There's a serious side to this request. The younger brother came to his father and said, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. He wants his inheritance and he wants it now. Now the sons would get their inheritance, but it would be normal that they would not get their inheritance until the father had died. And so you see the serious side to his request here is really he's saying to his father, Father, I wish you were dead.

[10 : 37] I wish that you were no longer here with your hold on me, with these shackles that you're putting on me. Give me my inheritance now so that I can go away and live my life.

And we go through these kinds of phases ourselves too. Not so much saying to our own parents, but saying to God, God, I wish you were dead.

I wish you weren't real. Because of you, my life is just curtailed. My life is not, I don't have the freedom I should have. I'm not able to live.

I'm not able to enjoy myself. God, I wish I could just get away from you. And we get to that point where we're saying, church is just a lot of do's and don'ts and they spoil my fun.

I just want to get away. I want to get on the plane. I want to go on the ferry. I want to head to Glasgow or London or further away, just to get away from God and to live my life.

[11 : 43] And the father gives the younger son his inheritance, his share. There's no point in arguing. There's no point in saying no because it's just going to rebel anyway.

So he gives him his share and he goes away. But can he get away from God? Can he get away from the father?

Can he get away of these thoughts towards him? Not at all. In the same way that we can never get away from God. We might think we're running away from God and rebelling against him, but we can never do that.

We can never get away from God. A psalm that often spoke to me in my own rebellious times was Psalm 139. And it speaks about taking the wings of the morning and going to the utmost parts of the sea.

And you think, I'll get away from God. But the psalm says, even there God is present. God shows himself.

[12 : 46] And thank God that he does. There's no running away from God. And what we see with the younger brother here is he goes away and he lives a reckless life.

He spends everything. He spent all that he had. He squandered the property, it says in verse 13, in reckless living. Squandered almost means just he threw it into the wind.

It's just like throwing money out of the window of a car as you're driving along. You're getting nothing in return. That's what the prodigal son was doing.

That's the way the word prodigal comes from. One meaning of prodigal is spending money or using your resources recklessly. And that's what he was doing.

Just extravagant. And he's had lots of friends then around him because he had the money. And he was having a good time. But is he really free?

[13 : 56] Is he really enjoying himself? He may have for a moment. There may have been pleasure for a moment. But it wasn't going to last.

He's running away. He's looking for the answer for his freedom that he so desires. He's wanting to come to the point to be able to say, I am free.

I am living my life. But running away from the Father. No matter how good the idea seemed, it was never the answer.

And that's what we see here as well as Jesus is telling this parable. What he's showing them is that it may be the answer that you're looking for.

But it's not the answer to your problem. Have you been running away like this younger brother? Have you been looking for your own freedom in this way?

[14 : 57] Wanting to be free from the shackles of religion and the church. And you're thinking, I'm going to be free. I'm going to do it my way. I'm going to do my own thing. But it's not working.

It's not working out like you expected it to be. You're thinking you're going to be free. But you're not. You're never free. When you're running from God.

Because the scriptures say we are always slaves to sin. Sin has a hold of us. And we're never free. If we're running from God.

Running from the Father isn't the answer to your troubles. As Jesus is telling this story. Remember the audience that he had.

The tax collectors, the sinners, the Pharisees. They'd have been shocked by the behavior of this younger son. And they would have thought as the story is going on. We're going to hear that this son is going to get punished for what he's done.

[16 : 00] We're going to be told how this, what happens to people who do bad things. They're going to get what's coming to them. So you can imagine the audience just waiting in anticipation, expectation of what's going to come next.

And as we move on from his request and his recklessness, we see the reality and his returning. Instead of freedom, what did he find?

He found what we all find when we run from God. The freedom, the joy that we had expected. It isn't there. It wasn't so.

He spent all his money. He had nothing left. And what happens is a severe famine arose in that country. And he was in need. So much need that he hired himself out to work with pigs.

The ultimate shame for a Jew is to work in this way. As a servant, as a slave to someone else working with pigs. It's an unclean work to them.

[17:07] And here he is in this shame. It hasn't worked out for him. And you can imagine the crowd. Well, that's what he deserved.

He didn't deserve anything else. This is what this guy deserved for taking from his own father before he had died. Running away, spending his money extravagantly. This is what he deserved.

That's the punchline they'd have been expecting. Jesus is going to explain to them. Now, this is what happens to bad people who do bad things. They get what's coming their way.

But what's the outcome that we see? Well, the reality of his situation is not what he expected. He was looking for his freedom, but it never came.

So what could he do? Well, you see in verse 17 the twist in this tale. When he came to himself.

[18:13] When he came to his senses, he said, He came to himself.

He came to himself. He came to himself. The story doesn't end with the prodigal son, the younger brother, being punished for his sin.

It doesn't end with him being in disarray. What we see is Jesus bringing good news into the midst of this. You see, the son may have gone away and forgotten a lot about home.

Forgotten a lot of things that had happened in his past. But one thing had remained with him. His father's house and his father. He had not forgotten him.

And how many of us have been blessed with an upbringing where we've heard all about. We've been under the gospel. We've rebelled. We've gone away. But one thing remains with us.

[19:34] What we learned when we were young. About God. About his love. About his mercy. And even if we've not had that in our upbringing, we're hearing it now.

We're hearing the story. This parable of a loving father. And our expectations of God can often be that because of what I've done.

Because of the badness of my heart. He'll not receive me. And that's the expectations the Pharisees had too. This father would punish this son.

He wouldn't receive him back. He would give him what was coming his way. But what we see with his son is he remembers his father. And we see repentance in his heart.

The sorrow of what he's done. The agony of what he's done. The hurt he's caused. The shame he's brought. But yet he still remembers his father as somebody good.

[20:44] And he goes back. He turns to go back. That many of us have longed to get away. But just found an emptiness in our heart.

But we remember the gospel. Remember something about the gospel that speaks of a loving God. Yes, there's a God who judges.

But he's a God of grace. A God of love. As we sang in Psalm 25. Verse 7. There the psalmist says of God.

Remember me in your great love. For you, O Lord, are good always. We may be bad. We are sinners. But God is good always.

And that's what Jesus is teaching in this parable. Going away. But in the midst of the turmoil. In the midst of God's providence.

[21:48] Of a famine. And of the shame of his new job working with pigs. He came to his senses. He came to himself. He came to remember that there is a God.

And a God who he can turn to. And that is the gospel to us today as well. That there is a God who will welcome us home.

If we turn to him in repentance. I love reading about John Newton. He's a man I can relate to in many ways. Who worked at sea.

And went away to different parts of the world. Which I did in my own past. But he was a rebel. But by God's providence. Through a storm off the coast of Ireland.

When the ship he was on. He thought it was going to sink. He was going to perish. But he cried out to God. God heard his cry. And saved him.

[22:48] And used him. In a powerful way. In a powerful ministry. And he could speak of that amazing grace. That is the grace that you can know.

If you turn to God. If you turn in repentance. Turn to go home. He's an amazing God. Of amazing grace.

The reality of his situation. And his turning. His returning. To his father. The third thing. And the final thing. I want us to see here. Is the reunion. And rejoicing.

That we see. His expectations. In returning home. We see. In verse 18. 19.

I am no longer worthy. To be called your son. Just make me one of your servants. That's his expectation. Maybe that's your expectation.

[23 : 48] There's very little. Of God. That even if you come to him. There's little. That he can give to you. But what we see here.

Is. The prodigal father. The prodigal God. Because prodigal. Also means. Not just wasting recklessly. It also means. Giving. Giving. Giving much. Giving excessively. And that's why we can call the father. The prodigal father. Or God. The prodigal God.

Because he gives. Abundantly more. Than we deserve. And what we see here. Is the reunion. And the rejoicing.

Of the father. To the son. The expectation. Of the crowd. As they're listening. On the fallacies. And the tax collectors. And the sinners. The expectation.

[24 : 42] Is that now. He's going to get. What he deserves. He's going back. To the father. And the father. Is not going to let him. Off with us. He will sort him out. But what do we see.

The father doing. He is looking. For his son. He arose. And came to his father. It says in verse 20. But while he was still.

A long way off. His father saw him. And felt compassion. And ran. And embraced him. And kissed him. While he was a long way off.

The father was looking. Longing for his son. To come home. He ran. To meet him. Not to punish him.

Not to give him. What he desired. But to show him grace. He ran. To him. Embraced him. And kissed him. And even in what the son.

[25 : 42] Says to him. In verse 21. As he comes out. With these words. Father. I have sinned. Against heaven. And before you. Can you imagine. That meeting. The emotion of it.

The joy of the father. The son. Who thought. He thought. Maybe even dead. He's welcoming. He's embracing. And he's hearing his son. Saying sorry. Asking for forgiveness.

Saying I am no longer worthy. To be called your son. Seeing that remorse. But then the father's response.

Is bring quickly. The best robe. And put on him. Put it on him. And put a ring in his hand. And shoes on his feet.

Dress him. This is my son. And I am so glad he is home. Give him the best. Bring the fattened calf.

[26 : 44] And kill it. Let us eat. And celebrate. For this. My son was dead. And is alive again. He was lost. And is found. And they began.

To celebrate. What a father. What a God. As Jesus is describing here.

And the Pharisees. They would have been shocked. By this. This son. Doesn't deserve. This. Does anyone.

Deserve it. And yet God. We see here. Is a gracious God. Is a loving God. We don't deserve it. But he gives us. By love. What we don't deserve. Jesus is showing here.

[27 : 47] His father. Who welcomes sinners. And tax collectors. Jesus sat. And ate. With sinners. And tax collectors. Why? Because they need the gospel.

As much as anyone. We all need. The gospel. We're all undeserving. Of the gospel.

But if we come. In repentance. If we turn. To God. He will receive us. He will delight.

In us. As his children. Because without him. We are dead. Run away from God. Run away from. Home as it says here.

Run away from God. And you are lost. You will never. Be satisfied. You will never. Find your freedom. You will never. Find your joy.

[28 : 43] But return. To him. And truly. You will find. A God. Who is concerned. For you.

A God. Who loves you. A God. Who delights. In receiving. His children. Home. How much. Does God.

Love you. Well. The Bible. Tells us. He loves us. To the extent. That he gave. His own son. This Jesus.

Who was telling. This story. He knew. The price. That was to be paid. For sinners. To return. To the father. The cost. Was his own life.

There was a price. That God paid. That sinners. May come home. To him. We are undeserving. We don't deserve.

[29 : 40] Any of his mercies. But thanks be to God. He is a God. Of grace. He is a God. Of mercy. And he is calling. On us. To come home.

To him. It is a time. That you came. To your senses. It is a time. To stop. Where you are going. And look. Remember.

Where you have come from. We are all. From God. We are made. By him. We are made. In his image. And no matter.

How much. We run away. There is always. Something in us. In our own. In our own. Conscience. In our own. Thoughts.

There are always. Times. When we remember. God. Maybe. Just for a moment. We are. We are. But we remember. God.

[30 : 34] Don't put these thoughts. Away. If God. Is speaking. To you. Turn. Turn.

Turn to him. That you might be saved. Turn. Even with the least. Of your expectations. He won't have me. Well. Remember.

The prodigal son. He turned. And received. What he didn't deserve. Because God. Is a prodigal God. Who blesses.

Abundantly. If we will come. To him. Turn. Turn. Turn to him. Return. To him. That you may know. What it is. To be free. What it is. To be alive. And to know the blessing. Of God. As your father. Welcoming.

[31 : 28] You home. Let us pray.