

Father and Sons

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Preacher: Adrian Lane

[0 : 0 0] This is the AM service on Sunday, September the 13th. The preacher is Adrian Lane and his sermon is entitled Father and Sons and is from Luke chapter 15 verses 11 to 24.

Well, thank you very much, Paul, for your invitation to be here this morning. And on behalf of the Ridley team, can I say how thankful we are to be part of your Good News Week this week.

And this week represents a terrific opportunity. It's an opportunity for two sorts of people. It's a special opportunity for those who may not yet be Christians, who are just thinking about it.

And because during the week, there's going to be lots of opportunities to find out more about the Christian faith and to ask questions about the Christian faith. And if you're in that situation, can I urge you from the bottom of my heart to take use of those opportunities?

Because the last thing you want to be is think at the end of the week, boy, I wish I'd taken those opportunities. If you are a Christian person already, then this is a great opportunity this week to bring along people who you're concerned for, that they hear the good news about Jesus.

[1 : 2 3] friends or relatives that you might be praying for, why don't you think, what would be a good event to bring them to this week? And on the green guide that you've been given, I'd be very surprised if you can't find something for them that's appropriate.

Well, we look forward very much to the week and thank you for your invitation to be part of it.

Tonight, Paul is going to be preaching. What are you preaching on, Paul? Ecclesiastes 1.

Ecclesiastes 1. Is Life Worth Living? Is that the title? Something like that? What a waste of time.

What a waste of time. Oh, that's cool. I'm sure the sermon will not be a waste of time.

I can promise you that. I look forward to hearing that very much. And then this week, at this time, I'll be speaking, and I want to speak about the subject that we find difficult to talk about, and that's the subject of death.

And it's interesting how people of all ages are interested in the subject of death. Well, this morning, I want to look at that reading that was read for us from Luke chapter 15, that story about the Son.

[2 : 2 6] Let's begin, though, with a word of prayer. Dear Heavenly Father, as we come before you now, we pray that you would open our hearts and our minds to what you're having to say to us.

Soften our hearts, we pray. And give us the courage to respond to what you're saying to us this morning.

Thank you so much that you speak to us through the Bible, and we pray that you'd speak to us today. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this story that was read to us this morning about the younger son is a great story, isn't it?

And the more we get into it, the more I discover how wonderful its message is. And the first thing that gets me about this story is the restlessness of the younger son.

He's yearning for freedom. Here we have a young bloke who's part of a family, and not just part of a family, but part of a property that is working on the land as the seasons go through their cycle.

[3 : 3 1] And he's not just part of a property, but he's part of a village, because what would happen in those days is that houses would be built together for protection and security. And he's living in this little village as the people are working on their properties.

And as this bloke has grown up in this village, he has come to know the community very well. He knows everyone, and everyone knows him. And no doubt there are other blokes around who he's mucked around with for as long as he can remember.

He's been to all the same birthday parties as they have. He's made slingshots with them. He's compared himself as he's gone through each of the stages of his life. You know how kids compare their muscles and talk about girls.

And no doubt, as he's been growing up, there have been older people also who know everything about him. In fact, they've watched him grow, and they probably know more about him or things that he can't even remember, like when he fell off a wall or maybe ate something dangerous.

But as the years have rolled by, all this has become a bit constraining, a bit boring, a bit stale.

[4 : 40] And he wonders what it's like out there. He feels trapped. It's too predictable. And somehow, he wants to prove himself and make his mark and to have some excitement and some fun.

He's restless for other worlds. And he doesn't want to miss out on anything. I remember distinctly when I was a teenager coming to the conclusion that the Christian message was true, that God was the creator and sustainer of the universe and that I should be living for him.

I came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was in fact God. But I didn't become a Christian. Why not?

Because I was scared of missing out. I knew that if I became a Christian, I wouldn't be able to do certain things. And I wanted to do them. I was restless. And this young man in the story is restless. And a plan comes to him. It's a preposterous plan, really, as one looks back on it. But at the time, it seemed like it was worth trying. He'd ask his dad for his share of the estate and cash it in.

[5 : 57] And amazingly, his father agrees. Now, it had been known in those days for parents to divide up their properties before they died.

So that when they did die, there wasn't a fight on their hands. But what this father does, and it would have been totally unheard of at the time, is to divide up the property in such a way that the son can actually sell it off.

And as he sells off the capital, he would be significantly reducing his father's income as his father aged. And what's more, for Middle Eastern people at this time, their land was very much part of who they were.

In fact, they didn't so much own the land, but their land owned them. And to sell off your land was being treacherous. It was saying to the rest of the community, I don't want to be part of you.

And that's one of the reasons that this younger son would have been keen to get out of the place as quickly as he could. Not only because he wanted to see what was out there, but because his name would have been marked.

[7 : 04] They've got the message all right. We're not good enough for you. I'm not... Yeah. This younger brother gathers together everything he has.

All his cash, all his clothes, all his personal knick-knacks. He wants to be done with this place for good. He wants nothing left there that would remind him of them, of him.

And he doesn't want anything left there that would remind him of them. All his sports trophies, all his surfing posters, all his footy posters, all his CDs. He's even remembered to take his toothbrush and his razor and the shampoo out of the shower.

All cleaned out and no doubt packed into good, fat, solid bags stashed with cash. Can you begin to imagine the pain of the father as he watches this going on?

The shifty dealing as the son sells the property, the packing up, and as the father's heart breaks for his son. And as he asks himself, have I done the right thing?

[8 : 20] Because this father is no mean, tight-hearted legalist who stands on his rights. Rather, this father gives up control.

He doesn't say, you've got to stick by and look after me while I get older. No, the father respects the will of the son and allows him to do as he wishes. But how hard that must have been for the father.

Those of us who are parents know that even though we bring up our kids to be independent really from the time that they're born, nonetheless, when they move away, it's a real gut-wrencher.

You love them just the same, if not more so. I was speaking to a friend of mine who, son's moved out at 21, and she said to me, he doesn't want to have anything to do with me. Yet I love him just the same.

I can't help it. And so is the pain of this father. The father knows this isn't going to be some maturing exercise.

[9 : 29] Rather, the father's wondering how will the son ever come back? Because his name is now trashed and his pride is strong. Well, what does the son discover out there away from his father in the land of so-called freedom that one can do what one wants, say what one wants to say, be yourself.

That life is good and free, perhaps, for a time, but soon the glamour becomes shabby and the glitz loses its sparkle and in time the carefree becomes lonely and the fun turns sour and quickly the cash is squandered and so-called friends are no good for alone and depression and a drought have come upon this country and what few resources there are are very meagely measured out by the locals and this foreigner has become an appendix, a parasite and so when he asks for a job, rather than rudely saying no to him, they give him a job that they know he'll refuse, feeding pigs, utterly despicable for a Jew.

But what's he to do? He has no place to go and his hunger is now stronger than his pride. And this son discovers that so-called freedom is in fact bondage, that so-called freedom is in fact humiliation, that so-called freedom is in fact aloneness and loneliness and this son is lost.

Oh, it's easy to have fun isn't it when you've got the dough but when it runs out there's nothing worse. you're now at the mercy of others who just want to use you.

No respect here, like in the father's house, no place or identity, no love or community. And this son comes to his senses and realises that even his father's servants have got plenty of food and here he is starving to death amongst pigs and at least the pigs have some food and someone who's supposed to be caring for them.

[12 : 01] And so he decides to go back to his father and ask for forgiveness. He realises that he's done the wrong thing and that he's sinned not only against his earthly father but chiefly against God, his heavenly father.

And he has this one very, very slim hope and that is this, that his father's still alive and that his father may just take him in as a servant. How he's going to face his father or the community, he doesn't know.

But what he does know is he hasn't got any option or any other choice. And so he makes his way back to the father, reciting in his head a little speech like when you've got to go up to the principal or you're pulled over by a policeman and you know you're in the wrong and you're just longing for mercy.

And look at him now, no nice clothes or horses or jewellery, scrawny, shabby, everything that he's had has been hocked just for a piece of food.

Imagine his shame and his guilt. And what happens when he's a long way off? His father sees him and runs out to him and throws his arm around him and kisses him and not just, you know, a polite kiss.

[13 : 29] His father is very passionate with him many times. And when the son gets a chance, he begins his little prepared speech, but the father won't have any of it.

The father quickly calls the servants and says, quick, get some clothes, get some rings, get some shoes. Let's have a feast and celebrate because this son of mine was dead and he's alive.

He was lost and he's found. Do you see what the father has done here? He was waiting, looking out for, longing, longing for his son's return.

And he has run the gauntlet for him. It was totally inappropriate in those days for older people to run. Basically, only servants and slaves ran. The older you were, the less you moved.

I mean, say the queen was down out of Flemington, you know, and her hat blew off in the wind or something. Can you imagine the queen running after it? No way! You know, some minion would go and collect it for her.

[14 : 32] But this father runs to his son. He wants to save him with the shame and the guilt of coming through the village with every eye looking at him and accusing him and saying, oh, look who's here.

He wants the son to know right now that he's been forgiven and that he's welcomed back. And what's more, the father wants the whole village to know that he's been forgiven and he's welcomed.

The robe, the sandals, the ring, all of those things show that the father has restored him to his former right relationship.

back in the family. He's to be treated as a son with all that that means. Sure, he's done wrong things, but he's asked for forgiveness and he wants to live a new life in the father's house.

And the point is that this father has always loved his son and is overjoyed at his return.

[15 : 41] And in a sense, his son's disobedience and wandering have only made his love for him more acute, more intense. The son had turned his back on the father and gone off on his own.

He'd done the wrong, his own thing, the wrong thing. But the father was waiting, patiently waiting. He couldn't go out searching for his son.

He'd given his son independence. He treated him maturely. All he could do was wait for his son to come home. And this father is exactly like God.

If you've wandered a little way or a long way, God is waiting for you to come home. He's longing for you to come home.

Oh, it doesn't matter if you're considered a real sinner, the low life of society, or if you're terribly respectable, even in church, like some of the listeners to Jesus when he first told this story.

[16 : 59] If you're a church person, you may not think this message is for you, but you do very well not to dismiss it too lightly and too quickly. Because true freedom can only be found when each of us are in a right relationship with our father, with God himself.

Oh, we can try and find freedom in some other place, in a car or in a new house or travelling or getting married or getting out of marriage, in having kids or getting rid of the kids.

But you see, true freedom will only come when we're in a right relationship with the father. And when that happens, everything else finds its place.

You may not understand everything that goes on in the father's house, but it's where we're all meant to be, under his care, under his direction, enjoying his company.

Come back. There is forgiveness. There is a home. And in fact, the penalty for the wrong things we've done has been paid for by Jesus himself when he died on the cross.

[18 : 20] We can now come back and know that the penalty for the wrong things we've done has been paid for. So forget about that old life in that distant country.

Remember what it was really like. There is a chance to restore those wasted years. Get rid of that old pair of pants and put on the new clothes in the father's family.

And this morning I want to give you an opportunity to make a decision to come back to God. In one sense it's not a hard thing to do.

In another sense it might be the hardest thing you'll ever have to do. And the way to come back to God is simply by talking to him in prayer.

And I'm going to pray a prayer this morning that you can pray to if you'd like to in your own heads.

Let me read that prayer to you so you know what I'm going to say. Heavenly Father, forgive me for wandering off and living life my own way.

[19 : 34] I'm sorry and I want to come back to you. Thank you for sending Jesus to teach me about you and to die for me so that I can be forgiven.

help me to live in your family as one of your children. Amen. Well do you want to make that prayer your own this morning?

Why don't we all bow our heads in prayer and if you'd like to make that prayer your own, pray with me in your own heads. Father, forgive me for wandering off and living life my own way.

I'm sorry. And I want to come back to you. thank you for sending Jesus to teach me about you and to die for me so that I can be forgiven.

Help me to live in your family as one of your children. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[20 : 58] Thank you.

Thank you.