

# The Gifts of Forgiveness

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Preacher: Rev Donald A MacDonald

[ 0 : 00 ]     Going to Luke chapter 15, I'm reading at verse 11. And he said, that is Jesus said, A certain man had two sons.

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that 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 fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.

[ 1 : 24 ]     And he said, Father, I will arise, and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

Make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw that compassion ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

And his son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, 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 this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

[ 2 : 42 ]     Now his elder son was in the field. As he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

He said unto him, Thy brother is come. Thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

And he was angry, would not go in. Therefore his father came out and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither, transgressed I at any time thy commandment.

And yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou wert ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad.

- [ 4 : 00 ] For this thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found. Amen. And may God bless to us that redeem from his truth.
- Let us again sing to his praise from Psalm 51 at verse 15. Psalm 51 and at verse 15.
- My closed lips, O Lord, by thee let them be opened. Then shall thy praises by my mouth abroad be published.
- For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it thee. Nor wilt thou with burnt offering at all delighted be.
- A broken spirit is to God a pleasing sacrifice. A broken and a contrite heart, Lord, thou wilt not despise.
- [ 5 : 07 ] Let us sing these verses. My closed lips, O Lord, by thee let them be opened. My closed lips, O Lord, by thee let them be opened.
- Then shall thy praises by my mouth abroad be published.
- For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it thee.
- Nor wilt thou with burnt offering at all delighted be.
- A broken spirit is to God a pleasing sacrifice.
- [ 6 : 41 ] A broken and a contrite heart, Lord, thou wilt not despise.
- Let us now turn to the passage that we read. The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 15.
- And we may read again at verse 22. Let us read again at verse 22.
- Let us read again at verse 22.
- So Jesus tells this series of parables, beginning with the lost sheep, followed by the lost coin, and finally the parable about the lost son.
- [ 8 : 32 ] In doing so, he shows that the scribes and Pharisees in despising Jesus for receiving sinners and eating with them, were out of step with the thrust of the ministry exercised by Jesus.
- In these parables he teaches that there is joy in the presence of God. Over one sinner who repents.
- And two of us can measure or quantify the joy which radiates out from the throne above. It even filters into the life of the church on earth, doesn't it?
- If you are in Christ tonight, you have had some experience of sharing in that joy when hearing of the conversion of a person or persons.
- This parable of the younger son focuses particularly on the sinners departed from God and the resulting misery and shame, which is the consequence of being estranged from God.
- [ 9 : 55 ] The story tells how he rejected home life and decided to move out on his own. He wanted to do with his inheritance as he saw fit.
- And in my view, the moment that he began to desire a different life to what he had, his downward spiral had begun.
- The moment he desired to move, not when he moved, but the moment he desired to move, the downward spiral had begun.
- That's how sin entered into the hearts of our first parents in the garden. The moment they desired the fruit, not when they ate of it, the downward spiral had begun.
- And they gave place to disobedience in their lives, with the hideous consequences that still afflict the lives of men and women to the present hour.

[ 11 : 10 ] So, you find that this man left. And of course, what he became was never recognized until in the words of the parable, in verse 17, he came to himself.

In other words, when he saw his life in its true light. Until our eyes are opened spiritually, we do not have a right view of ourselves, or of God, or of Christ, or of the purpose of life.

And when that does happen, possibly you wonder why you didn't see matters in this way before.

But you couldn't, because you were blind. You were spiritually blind. And the parable tells the story, at that stage, from the human standpoint, when he came to himself.

But we know, from other parts of the Bible, that no one comes to himself without the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the truth.

[ 12 : 34 ] This new view of self, and the world, and God, and Christ, doesn't come about through the power of natural reasoning. It's not something we arrive at by ourselves.

It's the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Although at the time it comes about, we may not be aware of the operation of the Holy Spirit.

And so you find his personal determination expressed, I will arise and go to my Father. He didn't wait for another moment.

He didn't wait for someone to come to assist him to travel. He resolved to undertake the journey alone and immediately.

And you know, there is a lesson there for every person who is under the gospel and who is reluctant or who are dragging their feet with regard to coming to Christ.

[ 13 : 46 ] Perhaps waiting for something rather than obey the Word of God. This man, when he came to himself, resolved to go to his father.

And so he didn't wait for anything further. He didn't wait until he felt more prepared to meet his father.

He didn't wait until perhaps he got a new suit of clothing. He didn't wait until he had earned more money.

He resolved to go immediately. And you know, so many people, they wait and they're waiting for something.

Oh, I'm not fit to meet Christ. I need something else. I need to be better than I am to meet with Christ. Christ. That's not what this man did.

[ 14 : 51 ] He arose and came. And it is worth remembering that the distance we have to travel, it's not a physical distance in the sense that we're required to travel by land, air, or sea.

The distance between the sinner and God is a moral distance. You do not need physically to move from one place to another in the community.

It's a spiritual going to God. It is in essence a surrendering of our once defiant, rebellious, arrogant life to the lordship and the headship of our sovereign God in Christ.

Christ. And you notice how he came. He didn't go to borrow better clothing. He didn't attempt to clean himself up.

He didn't try to hide his shame. He traveled as he was, unwashed, smelling of pig slops in the rags of his shame.

[ 16 : 01 ] There is no trying to make himself better, not that he could. He doesn't even wait for more thoughts or deeper feelings or conviction.

He just goes and puts himself in the father's hands. That's what we are encouraged to do just to come as we are. To put our self-righteous pride to one side and come in our rags and our helplessness and our sin and cast ourselves at the feet of the saviour.

As the hymn writer Pood suggests, as thou art without one trace of love or joy or inward grace or meekness for the heavenly place, O guilty sinner, come.

And so Jesus describes the return of the younger son in such affectionate terms. The reception given by the father exceeds all expectations.

and then you have the words of our text. Because you see, God's giving always follows his forgiving.

[ 17 : 14 ] And how do we know that he was forgiven? Well, it is there in the text. He fell on his neck and he kissed him.

And the language there in the original implies that he went on kissing him. It is the kiss of divine forgiveness.

And then you have the gifts which are marvelously detailed in the words of our text. Now, I would acknowledge that it is always risky to look for a spiritual interpretation of every detail in a parable.

On the other hand, we may easily fall into the error of treating as insignificant details which really are meant to be full of instruction.

And I cannot help thinking, even though some might disagree, that this detailed list of the gifts to the younger son is meant to suggest to us spiritual experience.

[ 18 : 28 ] You see, the impression is created that the father spared no expense in welcoming home his long lost son.

He gave him the best of everything and so I wish to spend a little time in examining each of the gifts. there are four, the robe, the ring, the footwear and the feast.

Firstly, the robe, bring out the best robe or bring forth the best robe and put it on him.

That was the command. And this detail, of course, like all the others, refers back and sheds light on the condition of the younger son when he returned.

There he stood, poorly clothed, travel stained, unwashed, no doubt smelling of his former place of work. And the father says, put the best robe on him.

[ 19 : 40 ] And when the best robe was put on him, it hid what was underneath. It hid the rags of his poverty.

And the father calls it the best robe. And you have to ask yourself, why is it the best robe? Well, let me make a few suggestions.

First of all, in my view, the best robe speaks of depths of love. In many ways, this robe is like the coat of many colors worn by Joseph in the Old Testament.

Remember what the Bible tells us, Israel loved Joseph, nor Jacob loved Joseph, and he made him a robe of many colors.

Joseph's robe was colorful testimony to the love of Jacob created a lot of problems in the family. It may have been an error on the part of Jacob to give this robe just to one son.

[ 20 : 52 ] But put that aside, just use it as an illustration here of the love that Jacob had for Joseph. And that, I believe, is illustrative of the best robe.

It speaks of great love. You see, Joseph's robe in the Old Testament couldn't hide the flaws in the life of Joseph, but the best robe does.

Hide the flaws in the lives of sinners. So, that's one thought with regard to why it is the best robe. It speaks of great love.

But it's also the best robe, I believe, because of its cost. And you might be asking, its cost? Yes? Because the perfect actual obedience of Christ, the God man, brought him into the dust of death.

death. That's the cost that was involved in acquiring and providing the best robe.

[ 22 : 09 ] Because Christ worked out a righteousness that is imputed to sinners, so that they can stand justified before God.

They can stand as being perfect, as being counted of perfectly obeying the law of God. That robe is the best robe which clothes the sin-born nakedness and shame of people like you and me.

So the best robe, because of its cost, because of the suffering involved in the life of the God man in acquiring the best robe.

the best robe, like every item of good clothing, it bears a distinguished label. And the label on the best robe states, designed by eternal wisdom.

Well, what else can we say about the best robe? Well, we all know the very familiar metaphor by which qualities of mind, traits of character, and the like are described as being the dress of the spirit.

[ 23 : 32 ] In other words, we speak about being arrayed in purity, wrapped in zeal, clothed with humility, vested with power, and so on.

And if we return to the Bible, we find a whole series of examples of this metaphor which guide us at once to its true meaning. In the Old Testament, you remember Zechariah saw in vision the high priest Joshua, standing at the heavenly tribunal, clothed with filthy garments.

And you remember the angel said, remove the filthy garments from him. And then we are given the interpretation, behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.

You see, it's not enough to have our sins forgiven. We also need a righteousness with which we can stand before a holy God.

Remember the Lord's parable of the wedding feast. When the king came in to look at the guests, he saw that there was a man who had no wedding garment.

[ 24 : 44 ] What happened? The man was tied and cast into outer darkness. Where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And you remember finally the visions of the last days in which the apostle in Patmos, the apostle John, saw the armies in heaven that followed their victorious commander, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure for the fine linen, is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And so, if you put all of these things together, then surely I am not forcing a meaning on a non-significant detail, but a very significant detail.

It sets before us the thought that the result of divine forgiveness being gifted by God is that the person is clothed with a character which equips them to sit down at the father's table in the father's house.

sacrifice. So, you see, it is not enough to say that not guilty. That's not enough to participate in the feast. We must also be perfectly righteous.

And you remember how the prophet Isaiah sang of this imputed righteousness, as he contemplated God's gift, I will greatly rejoice in the Lord.

[ 26 : 03 ] My soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans and to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

So that when you come to trust in Jesus, God imputes his righteousness to you, clothing you in his own perfect and glorious dress.

How critical it is that we are not relying in whole or in part on any righteousness except that which alone satisfies the demands of a holy God.

The perfect righteousness that he freely gives to all who believe in Jesus Christ. And for the apostle it was critical that he be found in Christ.

You remember how he expressed it in writing to the Philippians that he be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

[ 27 : 26 ] God will and you know you want to have that righteousness, you want to have it tonight, you want to have it when you come face to face with the last enemy death, you want to have it when you come face to face with the judgment seat, and you want to have it on the final day when God shall judge the quick and the dead.

the pardoned man is stripped of his rags and clothed with a new nature which God himself bestows. That's what we all need.

We haven't all been to the pig's die literally and physically. We may not all have fallen into gross sin, but in one way or another we have all turned our backs on the eternal Father.

We have all wanted to be independent. We have all preferred the far off land to be near home. In the words of scripture, all we like sheep have gone astray.

Without exception, we have turned everyone to his own way. And so we all without exception need to be clothed with the best robe.

[ 28 : 49 ] Do you have it? ring. And then the second gift is the ring. The younger son only wanted to be placed in the position of a slave.

Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and I'm nowhere worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of your hired servants. his father said, put a ring on his hand.

The ring was a symbol of wealth and position and honor. And that's one meaning of this gift that is given to the penitent younger son.

You might say it is also an ornament on the hand on which it glistens. That's another thought.

You might say it's a sign of delegated authority and of representative character. Again, going back to the Old Testament, Joseph was placed in a position of supreme authority, second only to Pharaoh in Egypt.

[ 30 : 10 ] And as a sign and an indication of the position that he occupied and the authority that belonged to him, Pharaoh's signet ring was placed on his finger.

And all of these thoughts it seems to me come together in this one detail of the ring. Freedom, exaltation, eminence of position, sonship, are all expressed in this gift, the ring.

And that leads me to say that by the mercy and miraculous loving kindness and quickening power of God in the gospel, irrespective of how low we fall as sinners, we can rise up.

Praise the Lord, writes the psalmist, and among the reasons he gives for praise is this. Praise the Lord. Why? He raises the poor from the dust, and he lifts the needy from the ash heap or the dung heap to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.

That's the kind of elevation that is given to those who are touched by the power of grace.

[ 31 : 34 ] And I can say that every forgiven person who looks into their own heart knows that forgiven sins leave many scars.

Forgiven sins leave many scars behind them. But this I firmly believe. On the basis of scripture that redeemed people are in a higher, in a final position than even the angels that never fell.

They are taken from the ash heap or the dung heap to sit with loyalty and glory. What a transformation taken from the dung heap.

Vile. Dung heap was the place where you put all your rubbish before we became a more modern society and we got the plastic bins and as the youngs would call it the trash wagon to come round and collect these bins.

But many of us who are older remember the dung heap where all the rubbish was placed. It wasn't a nice place.

[ 33 : 09 ] That's where God finds those whom he elevates to a glorious position on the dung heap. and perhaps Mephibosheth in the Old Testament is an example. His own assessment was that he was a dead dog, repugnant, loathsome, useless, summoned from Lodabar to a place at the king's table.

And you remember he was granted a status reserved for David's own family. And John in his gospel reminds us of the position of all who believe in Christ.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, what is true? He gave them the right to become children of God.

The Westminster Confession teaches about adoption that all who are justified through faith in Christ are taken into the number and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God.

[ 34 : 24 ] So the gift of the ring here equated with sonship. In the parable, these, there are words which may resonate with some here this evening.

And you may be here saying, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. That's how he felt when he came before the father.

And you may be here this evening and you are saying the same in the silence of your own heart. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

And you may be stating this in all honesty and sincerity. I have sympathy with you. But you know what? I am going to agree with your assessment.

That you are no longer worthy to be called his son. And you might be saying, well, minister, surely that's very discouraging. Well, let me explain. Remember when Mephibosheth was brought to King David's palace?

[ 35 : 34 ] It was because of a covenantal bond. It had nothing to do with Mephibosheth as such. David's purpose in summoning Mephibosheth was this, is there still anyone left of the house of Saul that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

So, if you are here this evening and you have been given the ring and elevated to this position, it's because of the covenant that was made with Christ. Your worthiness lies solely in him.

That's why I say you're not worthy. Who is? But I also recognize that these words may be spoken. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

These words might be spoken as an indication of your spiritual concern because of the state of your own heart this evening.

Because of what you see in your own heart and what you believe ought to be in your heart that would indicate that you are a son.

[ 36 : 53 ] And what you see makes you believe that you are no longer worthy to be called a son. and you know you are aided in this self-assessment by the discouraging whispers of the enemy of your soul.

So if that is true of you for your encouragement remember that the man who ended with the ring on his hand honored and elevated was the man who had looked after pigs and smelt of the pigsty the man whose lifestyle was marked by depravity despite his renunciation of sonship despite his own self-assessment with regard to his status yet on more than one occasion in direct contrast the father says this my son this my son oh how important that is can't you hear the love that lies behind that statement this my son let there be no dubiety about it and so nobody need doubt that however you however far you may have gone from God there is restoration possible restoration brings you as I said already to a higher position than the angels who never transgressed

God's commandment at any time will ever attain Christ your surety was made a little lower than the angels in order that those who had created lower than the angels might rise to a position that is infinitely superior that of being a son of God a child of grace and so the person who has within himself the experience of repentance of pardon who has come into living contact with Jesus Christ as Redeemer can teach angels how blessed it is to be a child of God and no less distinct are the other two things to which I have referred brought out by this man not only is the ring the sign of high rank it is also the sign of delegated authority and representative character you see

God sends poor penitents to be his witnesses in his world and the ring is an ornament on the hand that wears it which I suppose being translated is this where God gives pardon he gives beauty of character no life should be so lovely or so attractive or sparkle with so many jewel colours as the life of the man or the woman who has learned what it is first to be apart from God that brings misery but what it is to repent and to be clothed what it is to be forgiven to enjoy the privilege of sonship so the ring the robe thirdly the footwear shoes on his feet or sandals on his feet it is more than likely that he had returned barefoot his feet would have been filthy possibly even bleeding and it was necessary for the telling of the story that this detail should appear but you see

I believe it is something more than just a detail using the license of a storyteller does it not speak to us of equipment for the walk of life God prepares men and women boys and girls for future service and for every step that they have to take by giving to them his forgiveness for all that is past present and future this means that the sense of divine pardon will in many ways equip a man as nothing else will for running with patience the race that is set before them but you see along with forgiveness God communicates grace to travel on life's journey and his feet have put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace see through belief of the gospel of peace a person attains to the peace of the gospel life as everyone knows can be a very rough road and for those whose faces are set towards duty and

[ 43 : 01 ] God and self denial it is especially so even although there are many compensating circumstances there are places where sharp stones stick up in the path and cut the feet there are places where rocks protrude for us to stumble over there are all the trials and sorrows that necessarily occur in our daily lives and sometimes make us feel as if our path were across hot coals and every step absolute torture God gives those brought to him that which will defend against the pains and the sorrows of life the bare foot is cut by that which the shod foot tramples on without feeling there are unpleasant places on all our paths over which when we pass we shall certainly become polluted pit the man that which keeps his feet from being soiled even when they walk among filth and if at any time despite the foot where some mud or dust should cling to the foot we know that he who is bathed needs to wash only his feet.

The master with the basin and the towel will not be far away. There are enemies and dangers in life and God gives to the penitent man that which will set his foot upon a rock making his step secure so that you are able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm.



So the shoes on the feet are emblematic of defense, stability, shielding from pain, protection against evil are all included in this great promise which each of us may realize, if we will, for ourselves.

The footwear, the ring, the robe, finally the feast. And here you have, I believe, the main thrust of the parable.

The actual joy that characterizes heaven over the repentance of one sinner. The younger son was half starving and the fatted calf was killed for him.

[ 45 : 53 ] That was the complaint, you remember, of the elder brother. Now remember what it was that brought the younger son back.

It wasn't his heart. It wasn't even his conscience. But his stomach. He didn't get up one morning and decide to go back because he was, ah, filial affection that had lain dormant suddenly became active.

Or because a sense that he had been wrong aroused him. Or because he felt guilty at what he had done. Why did he return?

Because he was hungry. And well he might be. So that he even almost took the pig's will.

These were luxuries beyond his reach. How many of my father's higher servants have bread and enough to spare and I perish to have. Hunger was the motive in driving him at the outset.

[ 47 : 12 ] He was starving. You see, even such a modest motive as that is accepted by God.

And you see, whatever it is that persuades you to turn from the path that you are on, rather modest, however small, however insignificant it may appear, if you go back, you are assured of a welcome by the father.

This, this, this poor son was quite prepared to relinquish his sonship for the sake of a loaf of bread. because all he wanted to do was to appease his hunger.

But you know, he had to learn that he couldn't get the bread on the terms that he desired. you see, what he wished most was not what he needed first.

[ 48 : 42 ] He had to be bathed in the outflow of the father's love and forgiven before he could be fed. And being received, he could not fail to be fed.

So the message for you and me is this, first forgiveness and then every hunger of the heart is satisfied, all desires are met, every needful nourishment communicated, and the true bread is ours forever.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied. and you know, you could spiritualize it.

Hunger drove him to the father's house. What drove you to come here this evening? Was it a hunger for the bread of life?

Was it a hunger to taste of God's provision? Because where that hunger exists, you can be sure that God will satisfy it.

[ 50 : 07 ] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. that is the assurance that is given in the word of God.

Those who hunger after the things of God on a wet, windy, soggy Sabbath evening, was there that hunger in your own heart this evening when you left the house?

Because those who hunger and thirst are promised they shall be filled. Promised they shall be filled. That was a place for the son with the family around the table.

I am quite sure that in the royal palace of David they enjoyed special fare. Those leaders of the nations who met on the continent, they were eating the finest of fare.

I am sure that was true in the Davidic palace too. But what about the father's table? What might you expect to find on the father's table?

[ 51 : 53 ] How about a feed on the attributes of God? Healthy eating, strong fruit.

What about a feed on the purpose of God or the promises of God soaked in love? How about that for us souls? Many, many dishes so that you never be hungry.

Always attractive dishes and satisfying. let me ask, are you roaming with a hungry heart through all the areas of life separate from God?

Where are you seeking nourishment? Is it in the garbage of the sty of life? Or do you look for it in the elevated nourishment of mind and intellect and heart?

You'll always be unfilled because what the Bible says to you is this friend, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

[ 53 : 23 ] Here is the true way. for all desires to be satiated and appeased. Go to God and Jesus Christ for forgiveness and then everything that you need shall be yours.

Hear the advice of the word of God. I counsel you to buy from me white garments that you may clothe yourself. if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever.

The ring, the robe, the ring, the fruit wear on the feast. Oh, wouldn't you like to be a participant of this feast?

Let us pray. Oh, eternal God, how wonderful is your provision. How graciously do you meet with those who come in penury and penitence in the rags of their poverty.

How richly do you provide for them in Christ Jesus thy Son. How lovingly do you clothe them and give them a position in your family, giving them equipment for the journey, not just a significant position, but equipment for the journey and a position at your table, rightfully theirs, in your own house.

[ 55 : 12 ] O Lord, may we all be amongst those who have a position there and the glory shall be thine.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.