

# A Change of Status

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well let's turn again this evening to Luke chapter 15. Luke chapter 15 we're going to look at verses 20 to 24. Just from after the beginning of verse 20 there when he arose and came to his father we're now coming to what follows on from that down to verse 24.

We've looked at two parts of the parable previously. The change of company or environment that this young son, younger son wanted for himself which took him into this far country.

And then we looked at the change of mind that he had, the change that came when he came to himself when he actually then began thinking of all that he'd left behind and how much better it was for those who were there than for him where he was.

And we saw that that was itself these verses 17 to 20 a very apt description of repentance and some of the things that occur in a penitent person.

The mind is turned to God and leaves sin and that lifestyle and then it's completed in verse 20.

[ 1 : 18 ] He arose and came to his father showing that it was not just a mere resolution in his mind to go there. He actually came and went. He acted upon through the change of mind.

He acted upon what he had come to think upon and deliberate. He acted on that and he arose and he went. Back to his father. And tonight we're looking at a change of status.

Because when he arrived at his father's house some wonderful things happened. And this really magnificent picture that you find here in scripture.

It's a magnificent picture all the way through. But no part of it is more magnificent than this part which tells us about the reception he received when he got back home.

Now we've seen that this parable and the other parables before it are in direct response to the grumbling of the Pharisees who accused Jesus of receiving sinners and eating with them.

[ 2 : 23 ] And it's in order to answer that accusation. A very honorable statement which the Pharisees used contemptuously. And yet it's to answer that that Jesus gave these parables.

In other words what you think of primarily in the father in this parable of the prodigal son is in fact Christ himself. Now that's not to say that we don't understand the father's reception.

God the father receiving sinners. He does that. God the father bestowing adoption on us. He does that. God the father coming to show us his love in Christ.

And sending out his love letters to us in the gospel. So that we will come back to himself. That is all of that. That is the gospel. But strictly speaking the figure of the father is really the way that Jesus answered the accusation that they had against himself.

That he received sinners and was eating with them and was holding fellowship with them. By giving them this description. Of the welcome that the prodigal son received.

[ 3 : 36 ] When he got back home. In other words think of three things about Jesus. Though they're true about God the father of course as well. But let's focus on the fact that it's an answer to that that Jesus gave the parable.

There's three things about Jesus that are of great interest to us this evening. First of all Christ's eagerness to receive repentant sinners. Christ's eagerness to receive repentant sinners.

He arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off. His father saw him and felt compassion. And ran and embraced him.

You see when he was still a long distance away. This young man's father actually saw him coming. He was on the distant horizon. Maybe he hadn't yet seen his father.

But we're told here that the father saw him. In fact he had never been out of his sight. That's really what the parable is telling us. That in all the time that he was wasting his life in the far country.

[ 4 : 45 ] His father's thoughts were actually upon him. He had not let him out of his sight. He had not released him from his thoughts. This young man had turned his back on his father's house.

On all that his father's house meant to him. He had gone away at a great distance from his father's house. He had never actually got out of his father's sight. Every Christian.

Every converted person in here tonight understands that. And they're thankful for that. That in the times of your wondering if you are one of those people.

Like I was. That most of us was. That went away from the Lord. That strayed from his ways. That strayed from the church. That went away from the gospel. Yet you're thankful tonight.

That you can say and that you know for sure. That when you had forgotten your God. At least to a great extent. That when you had turned your back on him.

[ 5 : 40 ] That he did not do likewise with you. That is I followed you. Into the depths of your sinfulness. Into the depths of your wondering.

And his thoughts were constantly upon you. Long before this young man came to himself.

He was in the father of mind. Long before we repent and come back to Christ.

Christ has us in his sights. Christ has us in his view. Not so that we'll take comfort tonight from that great fact. And stay away from him if we haven't already come to him.

But that's so when we realize such a great truth. It will actually add something to the sorrow that we feel. When we think of our sin. And when we realize what it is to stay away from God.

[ 6 : 42 ] You remember Asaph. Asaph in Psalm 73. This man as a believer. Who tells us that he went so far away from God. In his thoughts.

In the way that he saw the world. In all its actions. And in the way that he had come to the conclusion. There's nothing like the same pains and sorrows.

In the life of these people. As in my life as a believer. And you know yourselves. The way the sand develops. And that's how he was thinking. And that's why he says that he was very near.

The point of slipping away. He says altogether. My feet had well nigh slipped. Until I went into the sanctuary of God. Why does he mention that? Because that's where he got his teaching.

That's where God brought home to him. That's where he came to himself. When he came to himself there. Asaph. Realized that he was just almost.

- [ 7 : 42 ] Like a brute beast. In the presence of God. When he considered that sort of. Wrong thinking that had been his lot. Nevertheless.
- He said. I am continually with you. He's not talking there. About his own. Grasp of God.
- He's talking there about. God's grasp of him. Nevertheless. Despite my wonderings. Despite what I was thinking. Despite all that I had done.
- Despite the way I was very nearly slipped away altogether. Nevertheless. I am still with you. You didn't let me out of your thoughts. You didn't abandon me to my own ways.
- You didn't let me go the way that I myself preferred. Absolutely. And finally. Without prospect of return. I am still with you Lord. I am still the object of your thoughts.
- [ 8 : 45 ] How precious therefore. Are your thoughts to me. Oh God. He was on the lookout for this. Younger son of his.
- Longing for the day when he would come back. And there is an aspect of Christ's eagerness. To receive penitent. Repentant sinners.
- Then you notice the compassion. This compassion. Out of which. All the following actions. Really arise. He was still a long way off.
- His father saw him and felt compassion. And ran and embraced him. That wasn't the first time. That his father had felt compassion. His father was filled with compassion. From the day he left.
- Jesus does not begin. To show compassion to us. When he sees us coming back to him. When he catches us on the horizon.
- [ 9 : 42 ] Making our way back to him. The Lord is full of compassion always. It is one of his chief characteristics as a person. Remember how it speaks of.
- The feeding of the five thousand. When they were following Jesus for some time. And had begun to wilt. Because they hadn't eaten for some time.
- What you read in the gospel account is that. The Lord looked upon them. And they were a sheep to him. They were like sheep without a shepherd. And then he said to the disciples.
- Quite deliberately. I have compassion on the multitude. I will not send them away. In case they perish in the way from hunger.
- I have compassion on the multitude. Tonight this Jesus. Is the compassionate Savior. Every one of us come to return to him.
- [ 10 : 45 ] Have come to meet with compassion. As they have come back to him. There is scarcely. A more precious element.
- In the person of Christ. To a sinner that comes back to him. Than to know that he is compassionate. That he is filled with pity.
- With mercy. With compassion. With understanding. And thirdly. He shows that he had no time to lose.
- This father. When the son was a long way off. His father saw him. He felt compassion. It is maybe not the best translation. He felt compassion. He was compassionate.
- He was filled with compassion. And he ran. And embraced him. And that is strange. And it is important that he says. That the Lord included this.
- [ 11 : 44 ] This detail about the father. Running towards his son. Because it was against convention. It was regarded as.
- A sign of. Not being really. Very careful about. How you appeared in public. You wouldn't find. Someone like this.

Lifting up his long garments. In order to run. Somewhere. As another father. That would be seen as demeaning. That would be seen as disrespectful behavior.

That would be seen as a lack of decorum. It is a lack of. Convention. It is not what you really expect. Of such a person. That is what God is like.

God does not act according to our conventions. God does not fit himself. Into the way we think he should act. God.

[ 12 : 45 ] Manages his own affairs. God is in charge of his own actions. vitamins. And in coming to.

This returning son. returning son this is a picture for us of Christ and how he is so concerned eagerly to reach this son to run towards him he doesn't let this returning prodigal come back home and then come to embrace him as he sees him on the horizon he runs toward him that's what you can see is true of Jesus as well maybe it doesn't fit theologically accurately but it actually makes the point really powerfully when God when Christ sees sinners coming back to him he quickens his pace towards them let's put it that way he doesn't stand still and say well he's been away a long time and I'll just let him come back until he's reached home then I'll show my compassion and my love for him notice the eagerness of Christ notice the eagerness of the Lord as portrayed in this father to run towards the returning son

I can perhaps imagine there are some folk here tonight who are reluctant perhaps some folk here tonight who are making their way back as it were but rather slowly they're afraid that perhaps when they reach Christ after all they have done and after all the refusals maybe he'll be a bit reluctant to receive them and this prodigal was probably something like that he wasn't rushing home he was probably walking very slowly thinking perhaps apprehensively of what might wait him when his father met him my friends tonight there is no reluctance with the Lord there is everything opposite to reluctance there is no reluctance because he is filled with eagerness to receive you and with eagerness that runs towards you as he sees you in your mind in your heart turning towards him taking the first hesitant steps towards him actually making your way plodding your way slowly perhaps towards again the saviour that has sent you such invitations to come back and here you find a picture that encourages you to pick yourself up and run because he is running towards you there is no reluctance in Jesus Christ to save if you are unsaved tonight the reason for it is not any reluctance in Christ if we talk about reluctance the reluctance is in here in our own hearts in our own minds in our own thoughts the slowness of action the unwillingness to actually make our way hastily to him it is not based on anything that is true of him it is based on what is in ourselves our fears our concerns our pride lots of things make us slow down make us hesitant but you can overcome them with this enormous thought that there is an eagerness in the Savior that is reaching out towards you

Christ's eagerness to receive repentant sinners secondly you find in this short passage Christ's welcome for repentant sinners the father saw him he ran towards him felt compassion he ran and he embraced him and kissed him and the son said to him father I have sinned against heaven and before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son but the father said to the servants bring quickly the best robe and put it on him put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet bring the fatted calf and kill it let us eat and celebrate what a welcome for a returning son who has done all of this against his father for all of these years and this is what he meets with his past is buried in that wonderful embrace everything he's done against his father is actually smothered in that embrace and in that kiss of reconciliation his past it's all there the father knows what he's done he knows that he's done all this against himself and against his upbringing and Jesus is like that with you and with me he knows what we've done he knows what's in our hearts he knows how we've spent our lives he knows how we've sinned against him he knows how we've spurned his invitations he knows the number of times we've refused to come back to him he knows that we have at least till now been following our own path many of us all of us did it to begin with and yet when we come to him he doesn't turn around and say to us do you think do you think

I'm going to receive you without you doing something that makes up for what you've done no he just throws his arms around us and says I know your past but it's in the past and I'm actually welcoming you now into the present and into your future and that's with me and isn't it hugely important that we notice that his reconciliation is sealed with a kiss God does not actually receive sinners coldly Jesus does not simply fill up a document and write his name on the bottom and say that's it there's such and such now I'll put a number at the top of the page he's one of my people she's one of my people I'll just put them amongst the list I'll file them with the rest and that's it it's not statistics with God it's not cold calculations with Christ you are received back into fellowship with God with a kiss with God's own affection embracing you and bringing you in there's the great contrast in the gospels there are two kisses that we can contrast the kiss of Judas and the kiss of Jesus or the kiss represented here by the father as he represents

[ 20 : 36 ] Jesus for us the kiss of Judas is the ultimate in hypocrisy he betrayed the son of man with a kiss the very thing that was meant to convey the most earnest affection and love a kiss that's how he betrays this Jesus and the kiss of Jesus is the ultimate in sincerity there are no false affections with Christ there is no false kiss with Christ you don't have to question the motive he has in actually embracing you in his love you know it it's a clean love it's a sincere love it's a welcome that's based upon this love that is his own as the son of God and you see his hurry the father's hurry when you compare what the son said here with what the son had practiced before he actually made his way home you'll find there's a difference the difference is that previously he had said

I will say to my father father I've sinned against heaven and before you I'm no longer worthy to be called your son treat me as one of your hired servants he didn't manage to say these last words why not because the father's hurry the father's eagerness the father's haste as he buried him into his bosom as he welcomed him with this clasp of love and with this kiss of reconciliation that overtook the son's words the son's prayer was overtaken by the father's haste and that's really saying something to us that's quite quite precious it's telling us that such is the eagerness and the welcome that Jesus gives us that it's as if he's saying well let's not mention these things anymore you're here and that's the main thing it's as if he can't wait to bestow the favor that he has to bestow the status that he has to convey again upon this lost son that was lost and because he's in such a hurry to do it moved by his love for him moved by this quality of his welcome that's how he deals with him how do we understand what that is saying to us tonight about the Lord

Jesus Christ you'll read many things about God nowadays you hear many things about him you'll find that some present him as a very cold and distant God and if he exists at all then he must be either cruel or just not interested in this world I find everything the opposite of that in this passage there is nothing in this passage of coldness of reluctance of stiff formality there is everything to do with warmth with affection with love with a haste to receive that which has been lost that's Jesus that's the heart of God because God has made himself known through his son no one says John has seen

God at any time the only begotten who is in the bosom of the father he has revealed him he has opened up his heart to us he is the one in whom we see into the heart of God and what do we see in this Jesus who has come to reveal to us the heart of God that the heart of God is a heart filled with compassion filled with warm affection filled with longing for sinners to return to him filled with eagerness to clasp them and do away with their past and then there is a command his welcome for repentant sinners includes not just this kiss of reconciliation but this command that he gives to the servants there is the son's prayer father I have sinned against heaven and stifled as it were in the hurry and the haste of the father but the father said to his servants bring quickly the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet just think about it what condition was the son in when the father embraced him did he tell him first of all go and tidy yourself up go and have a wash don't expect me to throw my arms around you until you've done something to tidy yourself up to clean yourself up to remove the filth that's attached to your body and to your hair having spent all of that time dabbling with pigs and groveling in the muck with them when he was yet a great way off in his rags and in his filth and with his stench still attached to him his father ran towards him and embraced him and threw his arms around him and kissed him and then he said bring out the best robe and that's important that's what he's saying bring out the best robe the best robe that's in the house that was a garment used on special occasions you might say it was a formal garment a garment that you would wear to a great reception and that was kept for these special occasions and belonged to members of the family and here is the father actually saying to the servants this is what you must do you'll go and get the best robe in the house and you'll put it on him now just think of that that when

God comes to receive us as we come back with the filth of sins still attached to us he actually gives us something to cover it to cover it effectively to cover it completely that doesn't mean of course that spiritually we don't get washed by Christ from our sins of course we do but that's in a sense what this means the very best covering it's not just any kind of covering it's the best you know when God covers our sins from his sight when they're forgiven when we're washed from the defilement of sin when we come by God to be sanctified when everything that the Bible tells us happens when we come back to God when God does that for us when Jesus receives us and does all this for us he brings forth the very best that he has the covering that you are wearing as a

[ 28 : 34 ] Christian that covers your sins and will cover them forevermore the covering of righteousness that's given the righteousness of Christ himself the standard that God requires that Jesus has obtained by his death on the cross that's the garment that's the best robe that God has that's what he gives you there's no second best with God God doesn't say well you know you spent all of this time in the far country you could have come back sooner than this and you went to great excess there you did things you didn't need to have done you went beyond really what was in any way expected of a son of this house therefore I'd like to give you the best robe but I'm keeping that for other people the best the best for every returned sinner God doesn't have a better than the robe he gives to those who come back to him and that's why Jesus died that's why he shed his blood that is essentially the meaning of the cross it's providing a covering the best covering for repentant sinners then put a ring on his finger instead of the muck from living in the way that he was living here is a ring that's on his finger what is a ring signifying what is all of this about it's restoring status to him it's giving him status that he had turned his back on that he had lost through his own willful turning away from his father's house what does

God give us what does Jesus do for us when we come back to him he gives us again the status of being restored as sons of God it was enough for this young man that he would be made a servant that's the prayer he was practicing and it's enough for us when we come back to Jesus with our minds filled with all that we've done against him we'd be happy with the status of a servant if he have us back at all that's the main thing lord I'm not worthy that I should be treated as a son that I should be given the dignity of a son in the family nonsense he says no one comes back to me and becomes less than a son and this was probably a ring that would have on it the signet a signet ring that would have the emblems of the family probably something like that that would have the crest of the family on it so if you think of it in those terms here is the son from now on every time he looks at his finger it's not the filth of the piggery that he has it's not the mire of his past life that he sees he sees a glowing gold signet ring and he looks at his signet ring and he sees the family crest and he says

I am a son in this family I have the very best that my father could give me I have a status of sonship restored to me and he put shoes on his feet to complete the picture slaves went about barefoot sons never did he's not a slave he's not received back in any less than the status of sonship well we may think surely that's not appropriate surely it's not appropriate for Jesus Christ the son of God the pure unspotted son of God to actually receive repentant sinners back and actually do this for them instantly without requiring anything else of themselves how can it be right for God for Jesus to actually restore all of these things to us knowing what we have done knowing our disobedience knowing all that we've done in our straying from him it's not appropriate and there's another figure in the parable we'll need to come back to that very much thought it wasn't appropriate that was his elder brother this just didn't seem right at all to him that his father would bestow such honor and status on what he called the son of yours he's not my brother he's your son but he doesn't deserve this and I deserve a lot more but you haven't given me anything like this well of course it's appropriate because you see when God restores us and gives us the status of sons he gives us the right to it because it's not dependent on your own doings it's dependent on the worth on the merits of Jesus isn't that what John says

John 1 12 he came to his own but his own did not receive him but to as many as received him to them he gave authority or the right to become the children or the sons of God here's one of the great things about being a son of God along with Jesus and because of the merits of Jesus the worth of Jesus along with that comes the right to be regarded to be regarded as a son of God by God himself and by yourself when you've come back to him when you've come to repent of your sin when you've come to yourself when you've made your way back to your savior he gives you the right nobody can take that right from you many people can question it many people can say it's not appropriate but God is saying nothing is as appropriate as that my sons should have the right to be such and that's what I give them so there's

Christ's eagerness to receive repentant sinners there's Christ's welcome for repentant sinners and there's thirdly briefly there's Christ's joy over repentant sinners bring forth the fattened calf 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 and as he says in verse 32 in answer to the elder brother it was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive he was lost and is found and when you go back to the previous two parables which we didn't go into in detail the element of rejoicing is very much a part of what's contained in them both with the sheep and with the coin the person who had lost the sheep when he had gone out and find it he laid it on his shoulders and when he comes home he calls together his friends and saying rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost same as the woman who lost the coin when she found it she said rejoice with me for

[ 36 : 22 ] I have found the coin that I had lost I don't understand it but I do believe that God rejoices that he rejoices especially over returned sinners I tell you said Christ there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents and you know that joy and this love of Jesus it makes not coming back to him all more serious it's when you realize all of this surely then you begin to realize what it is we are doing when we refuse to come back to him when we say even if we say yes

I'll do it someday soon the fact of the matter is what we're saying now is what registers in heaven not our promises not our resolutions not our intentions because when you intend to come back to him someday what it really means is you're staying away from him today and when you're staying away from him today you're treating this joy and this love of Christ with contempt do you want to do that do you want to keep on doing that surely not after seeing the eagerness the welcome the joy of Christ himself Elizabeth Browning was a famous poet in the 1800s she was Elizabeth Barrett until she married the poet Robert

Browning actually she was it seems a better poet than he was but her father was a very strict person a rather cruel person in fact and he forbade her and other member of the family to marry at all otherwise they would lose their inheritance she eventually married Robert Browning when she was about 40 and very soon after marriage they left the country and went to live in Italy which is where they lived where she lived along with him in a very happy marriage for the rest of her life her father disowned her he never spoke to her again and yet she kept writing letters to her father every week ten years after she left a large brown box was delivered to her house in Italy when she opened it she found all the letters that she had sent to her father over these years all unopened he had sent them back without even opening them

Christ has sent you and I many love letters over the years when you come to meet God will he have a box in his hand full of these letters unopened that he sent to you or will it be another kind of meeting will it be a meeting where you hear the words well done enter into the joy of your Lord let's pray oh Lord our God help us we pray to come to terms with these great issues of your own being and your own person and attributes that your word set before us help us to come to terms with the wonder of your love the wonder of your patience with us the wonder of your compassion of the instant reception you give to returning prodigals the wonder of that kiss of reconciliation the wonder of all that awaits those who come back to you help us

Lord to come to terms in the only way that is proper for us to do so in accepting your own call and in coming back to our Father and your blessing we pray to that end to us and graciously give us each day the help that we need so that we do not stray away from you hear us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen