

Moore College Mission Matt Baines

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Date: 23 March 2013

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Well, it's great to be with you again this evening. I just want to reiterate what Sam has said already. If anything I say tonight resonates with you, we want to give you the opportunity and we want to encourage you to respond in some way.

And Sam's going to talk about that more afterwards. But I want to begin by making a confession. I hate reading instructions. I know that shouldn't come as a shock, given that I'm a man, but I hate reading instructions and I especially hate reading maps.

And I want to tell you a story. It's a little embarrassing. One day I applied for a job as an accountant. That's not the embarrassing bit, by the way. And I organised an interview with a recruitment consultant.

And I thought... I was on the phone, I was trying to take the address down, and I thought, yeah, I've got the address in my head, and lo and behold, the time comes around to go to the interview and I've forgotten the address.

Now, I think I know roughly where this guy's office is, so at the right time I head out to try and find this office and I don't seem to be making much progress.

[1 : 08] And about ten minutes after the interview was supposed to have started, I get a phone call from this recruitment consultant. And he says to me, Matt, are you lost? And I say, I'm not lost.

I'm just directionally challenged. And I realise that I'm often reluctant to admit I often don't recognise that I'm lost until it's too late.

And this is about a story about a guy just like me who's reluctant to admit that he's lost. In fact, he doesn't realise that he's lost until it's too late. Now, to appreciate this young man's situation, we've got to go back in time and understand just how fragile life can be in Middle Eastern culture 2,000 years ago.

If you were in a wealthy family who maybe owned a farm, you might have hundreds of silos full of grain. And if you have a bad couple of years, if the harvest fails a couple of times, you could go broke very, very quickly.

There's a very real danger of starving to death. So, when this young man sets out from home, blows his cash on fast living and finds himself working as a slave in a land that's struck by famine, he's in very, very dire straits.

[2 : 36] He's quite literally at death's door. Just as an aside, Jews aren't allowed to eat pork. So, you know things have gotten pretty bad when you're a Jew and you long to eat pig food.

But this guy's problem isn't just physical hunger. He's got deeper problems. And his problems don't actually start when he gets to the foreign country. His problems actually start at home.

At the very beginning of our passage, in verse 12, the younger son asks for his share of the family's inheritance. And there's no apparent reason.

He doesn't need the money. He doesn't want the money for any particular purpose. It's only later in verse 13 that he actually heads to a foreign country.

There's a much deeper problem involved. In Middle Eastern culture, it's very, very shameful to ask for your inheritance early.

[3 : 40] Because when you ask for your inheritance early, it's like saying this. It's like saying this to your mum and to your dad. I wish you were dead. I wish you were dead.

That's what it's like. You see, the father and the son have a broken relationship. They're estranged. They're alienated from each other.

And later, the physical distance between them merely underlines the emotional distance between them. So when you find yourself in a mess like this, how do you find your way out?

When you've got very deep physical needs and emotional needs, what can you do? Well, there's basically, there's two solutions.

The first is to try and fix the problem yourself. It's interesting that the young man in our story, he's not as useless as you might first think. He tries to fix his problems for very early on.

[4 : 38] If you have a look at verse 13, he tries to fix the hole inside him by going travelling and by living up a party lifestyle. Now, there's nothing wrong with travelling and there's nothing wrong with going to parties.

But they can't fill all of our physical and our emotional needs. Then things get worse. He finds himself short of cash and so he gets a job to try and work his way out of his problems.

It's a pretty menial job. Now, maybe he's hoping that he'll rise through the ranks and maybe make something of a career for himself one day. And I want to say, that's okay, work's terrific.

But again, work can't fulfil all of our physical and our emotional needs. Travelling, partying, working, none of these things worked.

They couldn't fix the hole inside this young man's stomach and they couldn't fix the hole inside his heart. But then, in verse 17, it says, he came to his senses.

[5 : 53] And what he does next is really critical. In verse 18, he says, I will set out and go back to my father. So I want to take a step back and ask, what's Jesus trying to tell us by telling us this story?

It's this. If you're at death's door, if you have very deep physical and emotional needs, come to your senses and return to God who's your heavenly father.

Sam mentioned that I told some of my story last week. If you weren't here last week, I shared that my dad's a prison chaplain. He works out at Long Bay Jail and it's been a great privilege for me to go out with him sometimes and visit some of the inmates.

And one day, I went with him to the psychiatric ward and I met a guy named Anthony Waterlow. Now, Anthony suffers from schizophrenia and four years ago, he went to visit his father and his sister in Clovelly and in a schizophrenic rage, he stabbed them both to death.

And he's been in the psychiatric ward ever since. But when he got to prison, two really important things happened. Someone started to treat his schizophrenia and someone gave him a Bible.

[7 : 27] And he started to read the Bible and he started to pray. And he quite literally came to his senses. After a short while, he approached my dad and said, can you start running church services for me and my friend?

It's incredible. He's a guy who has killed his earthly father and sister. But now he knows God as his heavenly father.

If it's possible for a man like Anthony to know God as father, it's possible for anyone. So what sort of thing can you expect when you come back to God as father?

How might an earthly father respond? Perhaps you would expect him to stand there, arms folded, waiting for a pretty good explanation. Maybe he might be thinking, you know what, I'll put him to work for a few years until he learns his place and then I'll slowly let him back into the family.

Maybe he's thinking, you know what, what this son has done is just too much. I can't handle it. I don't want to even acknowledge that he exists anymore.

[8 : 54] The father in this story shatters all of our expectations. Take a look with me at what happens.

It's actually pretty funny. I kind of think it's almost like slapstick comedy. You see, the father sees his son a long way off and that tells you that he must have been out looking for him.

And when the father sees his son, his heart literally skips a beat and he starts to run through the town. He lifts up his ropes and he starts running through the town.

And again, in Middle Eastern culture, that's just something you don't do. It's very, very embarrassing for a patriarch in a family to do that sort of thing. And then the father literally throws his arms around his son's neck and he gives him a great big sloppy wet kiss.

And the son hasn't even said a word. He tries to. He tries to begin his apology but the father cuts him off.

[10 : 04] And he's about to say to your father, Father, I'm not worthy to be your son anymore. But the father actually reinstates him. And he gives him an expensive robe.

He puts a ring on his finger and he puts a robe on and sandals on his feet. And he throws the homecoming party of the century. The father welcomes the son with complete joy and acceptance.

Why? He gives a reason in verse 24. He says, this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.

For all intents and purposes, this guy was dead to his father and now he's alive again. Every time someone returns to God as their heavenly father, this is how God celebrates.

Just like this. He jumps for joy. He throws a huge party. If you come to your senses and return to God, he's going to accept you back.

[11 : 20] You don't have to try and gain the father's acceptance by trying to fix your past mistakes or by trying to live up to any expectations. Just come back.

I want to tell you a story about a young girl from Brazil named Christina. Christina. She was living in a small town. She thought life was pretty boring. She wanted to enjoy the big city so one day, without a word, she leaves home and heads to Rio.

Now, she had no way of earning money and after a couple of weeks, she resorts to prostitution.

When Christina left home, her mum was sick with worry and she was a pretty clever woman.

She takes a photo of herself and she prints off a lot of copies and she takes each photo and on the back of each photo, she scribbles a little note.

Then she goes up to the city and for days, she walks around, walking around all of the clubs, walking around all of the dirty streets, walking around the brothels, the hotels and she leaves all of these photos around.

[12 : 38] She attaches them to letter boxes and phone booths, hundreds and hundreds of photos of herself with these little notes on the back. But after a while, she doesn't find a daughter and she has to go home.

Well, a couple of months later, Christina is a broken woman. She's just devastated that she's thrown away everything that she had at home and one evening in a little hotel, she's climbing the stairs and she looks across at a mirror and she sees one of these photos attached and she recognizes the picture and she thinks, that's my mum.

And she goes and she picks up the photo and turns it over and looks at the note and this is what it says. Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, please come home.

if you return to God as your heavenly father, whatever you have done, whatever you have become, he'll accept you.

Now, you would expect the story to finish there but it doesn't. You see, there's an older brother in the story and he's really upset and to be honest, you can understand why.

[14 : 05] Try and put yourself in his shoes. Your younger brother has just blown some of the family inheritance in the space of a single generation.

He's embarrassed the family and to add insult to injury, the father has put on an extravagant meal to celebrate. Why did he have to do that?

Why did the father have to kill the fattened calf for crying out loud? I mean, that was the kind of thing you did when someone got married. Couldn't he just have celebrated with some pizza and Coke? Surely the older son, he's got a right to be upset.

But here's the problem. The older son doesn't want the father. He wants the father's stuff. And he thinks he can get the father's stuff based on his performance, not based on the father's love.

You see, the older son lives in his father's house, but his heart might as well be a million miles away. And this is the great tragedy of the story.

[15 : 24] Neither the younger son or the older son understand what it means to be a true son. But I want to ask, who is the more tragic figure in the story?

Well, it's the older son. Why? Because older sons don't realise that they're lost. Now, it's important to know why Jesus is telling this parable.

Jesus is in a crowd sitting and talking with sinners and tax collectors. Tax collectors were very bad, I can say that because I was one for a while. And the reason they were bad is they were Jewish tax collectors but they cooperated with the Romans in order to get taxes.

So basically they were considered traders. They were socially undesirable. They were considered lost. But there's a few other people in the story as well.

At the start of the chapter there are some Pharisees and some teachers of the law looking on. Now, they're basically the religious and social elite.

[16 : 38] They're the movers and the shakers. They're powerful people. They're the kind of people that you see on red carpets and at celebrity parties. They're successful and they're admired.

But they're also confused. They're thinking why would Jesus want to eat with these kind of people and talk with them? Why would he want to talk with sinners and tax collectors?

People who are spiritually and socially lost. So Jesus tells them this parable. And here's what he's saying.

He's saying the religious and the social elites of this world are often like the older son. Society might look up to them.

They might do all the right things. They might be generous. They might even go to church. They might be heavily involved in church. But they're still estranged from their father because they don't want their father.

[17 : 44] They want the father's stuff. Now, if you're offended by the idea that God could love people like the younger son, if you're offended by the idea that God could love people like Anthony Waterlow, then you're an older son.

When you're offended by God's generosity, when you feel personally wronged, that he looks after the people that the world looks down on, you're an older son.

And you need to know that God's love, the father's love, is big enough for everybody. Not just the spiritual and social elite.

And you need to return to your heavenly father. father. So I want to say this, if you're just outside the door, if you're a long way off, whoever you are, come home, come back to the father.

It doesn't matter what you've done. Well, it does matter, actually. It matters so much that Jesus was punished for our wrongdoing.

[19 : 03] sin. You see, God has run out to us in the person of his son. And his son endured great shame by dying for us on the cross for our sins.

God desperately wants us to return to him. And he showed that desperation through the death of his son. So if you're a younger son, if you're an older son, if you would like to know God as father, we can give you a map.

We can show you the way. Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, please come home.

Come back to the father. Amen.