

A Warm Welcome

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Date: 08 January 2023

[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship this evening by singing to God's praise in Psalm 103. In the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 103, at the beginning of the psalm, we'll sing from verse 1 to verse 5, the tune is London New, page 369 of the psalm.

Because O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stood it up, his holy name to magnify and bless. We'll sing from verse 1 to 5, and we stand to sing.

To my death I am blessed. Bless, O my soul, the Lord my God, and God forgetful be.

Of all his gracious benefits, he hath bestowed on thee.

All thy name, liberty to God, most graciously forgive.

[1 : 51] Who, by this season, all that grace, shall he love me, reveal me.

Who doth redeem my life, but mine, to the end, mis-wrought, O die?

Who, with loving kindness, doth, attend thy mercies cry.

Who, with abundance of good things, doth satisfy thy mind.

As bow our heads in a word of prayer, let us pray.

[3 : 19] our gracious father in heaven as we come to worship you this evening we thank you for the words that we have sung together they remind us of the very purpose for which we come into your presence why we gather as a people as we do this evening and why as we go on and go forth into the week ahead that we live lord to give praise and worship to you and we ask lord that even as we come this evening anew that our souls will be filled with a sense of gladness and a sense of rejoicing in you as our god as our father in heaven that you will help us to focus upon you and that you will take away lord so many other things that can come between us and your and worship of you for we know that so often in our hearts and in our minds that there are barriers between us there are ones that we put up ourselves there are ones that are put there by others there are so many other distractions to us but we pray lord that you will help us to be still this evening and to know the goodness of god and to know the mercy of god we thank you that you are a god who remember as the psalmist says and help us that we would not forget forget all the benefits that you have shown towards us that in our every need in this world that you are provided for us that in our weakness you give strength and in our strength you humble us for we know lord that we are not to go on looking to ourselves or depending on ourselves for we are dependent upon you and the more we realize that the more we know the strength that you are able to give the strength that you promise to all of your people that strength that even renews us as the psalmist says and we pray lord that for all of us here together and for all of us who tune in online as well as we go on in this new year as we go on day by day that you will indeed renew our strength that you will lift us up that you will build us up as a people that you will restore us lord to you as a people that you will draw us ever closer to yourself that our walk with you that would be precious to us that our walk with you would be something that we long and desire for and that our walk with you lord would be blessed by you as well in the days that lie ahead we do pray for our people we pray lord that you will come near to us in these days that you will minister to us we have been reminded oh lord so much in these past days and weeks of how frail a people we are and so often as we have reflected already in these past weeks as we come to the end of the year and the beginning of a new year there is so much oh lord that we look back upon and help us lord with all our different emotions help us oh lord with all our different fears and worries to be able to cast our cares upon you for you are the one who cares for us and we thank you lord that you give strength to help in every time of need whether it's in times of grief and mourning as so many have experienced in these past months and even these past days that you promise oh lord to gather around your people to uphold and to strengthen to be their shepherd leading them oh lord at all times and so we pray that you will be near to those who need you in that way that you will uphold and strengthen us only you can remember those who are unwell as well in our midst remember those

with so many different ailments throughout our congregation and throughout our communities at this time we know lord that there is so much that goes on around us and that we don't know about there are so many illnesses that are obvious to people but others that are hidden and only known unto the individual or but known unto you as well and so we pray lord for those who are struggling in different ways we pray lord that you will gather them to yourself that you will draw them oh lord to know that you are the all-sufficient god that you are the one who is able to do so much more than we ask or imagine so help us all that we will come to you in prayer with faith believing that you are god believing that you are the one who made the heavens and the earth and all we see around us believing in you as the one who who makes all things work together around us when we survey the the world and the universe around us lord we marvel at the creation the way the days move on the way the minutes take over the way the sun rises and the sun sets where the stars appear and disappear from our sight and yet oh lord it is all seen unto you there is nothing hidden from your sight there is nothing unknown to you and so we pray that in humanity's search for wisdom and understanding that we would recognize that you have given us so much that there are things hidden from us for our reason but there are so many things that you have revealed to us and that for our benefit and we thank you for the revelation of your word we thank you for how clear it is how precious it is we thank you that we have it before us even this evening and you to be able to read it and share from it together and we pray that you will bless your word bless it to ourselves and to all your people who gather as we do bless it to our nation and bless it to the world that in all the different languages it goes out and all the people it reaches that we would see oh lord that this is the wisdom that we need and the fear of the lord is the beginning of all wisdom so teach us what it is to live in fear of you not just trembling before you as a holy god not just fearful of judgment or all that that might entail but fearful in the sense of living for you rejoicing in you being glad to know that you are god and above all being glad to know that you have provided for us a savior and that your own son the lord lord jesus christ and that we will be glad to know that through faith in him we have the assurance of salvation and the hope of eternal life and so bless your word that unchanging word an unchangeable word bless it to our souls bless it to our hearts anew this day and in all the days ahead may we find in your word that source of life that source of blessing and that source of wisdom so bless your church we pray far and wide build it up for your glory come in a day of your power to revive your people far and wide to revive ourselves in our hearts to be a people to go on in the strength of the lord looking unto jesus the one who perfects our faith and so we pray lord for your church we pray for our our land at this time as well we pray lord that you will turn us to yourself that in the midst of all that's going on around us in the midst of all the troubles of this world that you would turn us as a people to call upon the name of the lord and so we pray lord that you will draw near to us and continue

with us this day and in the days ahead as well in this week and all it entails in funeral service that are to take place and other activities that go on as things like the toddler group resume and so we look forward to times of fellowship at different times as well we know lord that that is the reality of our lives the mix of of highs and lows joys and tears but we thank you that in all things you are faithful and may you bless us as we endeavor to go forward in your strength that you would bring us oh lord to know the blessings of christ more and more draw people to yourself we pray we pray to see people coming out to church to come under the gospel not just here but far and wide to hear and rejoice of sinners being saved and so we ask lord that you will bless us that you will come down in your power that you will draw near to us as we seek to draw near to you guide us then we pray and go with us throughout the rest of this service and the rest of this day and into the week ahead may you help us to rejoice in you and even as we sing your praise this night oh lord help us to lift our voices to you with gladness in our hearts and to sing with all our might help the one who leads us in the praise lord bless him and uphold him in that and bless us all together around your word and the singing of it and the reading of it and meditating upon it and all we ask we ask acknowledging our shortcomings and how we fall short of your glory but yet oh lord we thank you for our redeemer the lord jesus christ the one who with loving kindness does us crown and so hear our prayers and pardon our sins so we ask it all in jesus name and for his sake amen we're going to continue to praise god by singing from psalm 65 psalm 65 in the scottish psalter page 297 of the psalm book we tune for this one is done firmly we're going to sing from verse 1 down to 5 to 5 to 5 to 5 to god's praise we stand to sing praise wait for ■ ■ ■ ■

The mark of prayer, all flesh shall come to thee. Iniquities I must confess, we lay against me due.

But as for our transgressions, then merge away, shalt thou.

[15 : 05] Blessed is the mother whom thou dost choose, and makes approach to thee.

That he within thy courts, O Lord, may still the dweller be.

We surely shall be satisfied with thy abundant grace.

And with the goodness of thy powers, be not thy holy place.

O God of our salvation, thou in thy righteousness, Thy fearful words unto our prayers, thine answer dost express.

[16 : 36] There for the ends of all the earth, and those afar that be, upon the sea, their confidence, O Lord, will praise thee.

We can turn together now to read God's word in the Gospel of Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15, we take up our reading at verse 11.

Luke 15 at verse 11. And he said, there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had, and took a journey into a far country. And there he squandered his property in reckless living.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

[18 : 13] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he had come 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 I 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. And 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 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 his servants, Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring the fattened calf and kill it, and 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. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

[19 : 43] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.

Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. But when the son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this, your brother was dead and is alive.

He was lost and is found. And so may God bless that reading from his word. Before we come to look at this passage, we'll sing again to God's praise.

[20 : 55] This time in Psalm 42, in the Singed Psalms version, page 53 of the psalm book. Psalm 42, we'll sing from verse 1 to verse 5.

And the tune is Meryl. As pants the deer for flowing streams, so long's my soul, O God, for you. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I meet with God anew?

We'll stand to sing to God's praise. As pants the deer for flowing streams, so long's my soul, O God, for you.

I thirst for God, the living God. When can I meet with God anew?

My tears have been my constant food, Both in the night and in the day.

[22 : 20] My Lord, my Lord, my Lord, insist on me, When is this God of yours to stay?

As I pour out my soul in grief, These things I do remember still.

How well the multitude I went, Up to God's house on Zion air.

In their possession I would lead, As we approached with cheerful song, And shouts of joy and thankfulness, Rejoicing with the festive throne.

Why are you so disturbed in me?

[24 : 11] Trust God for I will praise Him yet, My Savior God, my God is He.

If we can turn back to our reading in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15.

We're looking at this section we've read, The parable of the prodigal son. We can read again at verse 20.

And he, that's the son who had gone away, 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 and kissed him.

And so it goes on. What is it that brings you to church tonight, Or this morning, Or on a week to week basis, Or maybe as a one off now and again?

[25 : 21] Perhaps even you're thinking of coming back, To church at the beginning of a new year, To try and maybe get back into the routine, Get back into the habit of coming along to church.

But what is it that it means to you, To come to church? There's a number of different ways we can think about it, Or look at it, And perhaps some of these ways you look at it yourself.

Sometimes we think of coming to church as coming to a particular place, A particular building. Sometimes we think of coming to church as something that we should do, That we ought to do.

Sometimes we think of coming to church as just hoping that it'll stop someone nagging you, To come along to church. There's so many different ways that we think about maybe coming to church, Whether we've come on a regular basis, Or whether we're just coming back, Or maybe even never been before.

But it amounts to the same thing, Coming to church. And it's none of these things that I've mentioned already. Coming to church at the heart of it, Should be about coming to meet with God.

[26 : 35] To meet with the Lord as he speaks to us through his word. Coming with the desire of the psalmist, As we've just sung from Psalm 42.

With his panting, with his longing, Just like the deer pants for the flowing stream. So long's my soul, O God, for you. I thirst for God, the living God.

When can I meet with God anew? Is that your desire as you come to church? To meet with God.

To meet with God anew. That he puts this thirst in your soul that can only be quenched by him. Coming to church is coming to hear a story that can change your life entirely.

That maybe for many here has changed your life entirely and in so many ways. It's a story of a love beyond any other.

[27 : 35] A love shown through God by giving us his son. A love that brings us to realize that nothing in this world compares to knowing what this gospel story is all about.

Coming to church is coming to meet with God. And as we gather, we hear the word of God.

And we hear the word of God proclaimed. Perhaps you come today. Perhaps you come every day and you hear the word of God again and again. And you think to yourself, what's it actually doing for me?

Is it changing anything within me? Is it changing anything about me? But the more you are putting your trust and your confidence in this word, the more it is building you up.

The more it is strengthening you. And the more it's helping you to realize that there is nothing in this world that compares. And even at times when we try and maybe go and look and search for something else, as many of us have maybe done or many of us are maybe doing at the moment, we go chasing after the things of this world.

[28 : 46] But when we've heard something of the word of God, it stays with us. Just like it did with this son in this parable that Jesus tells. This story that Jesus tells of the prodigal son.

The one who thought that he could just go away from God. And there he would find everything that would satisfy him. Everything that would fulfill his life. And he found just emptiness.

He found there was nothing in this life for him that compared to what he had already had with the father. And so he came back. He came back to the father.

It's a wonderful story. It's a wonderful gospel message for us. For many people today, storytelling is a dying art.

Something that used to be such a powerful way of sharing together. Where people would meet together in homes or different places. Just sharing stories together. That's not to say that there's not people today who can still spin a good story.

[29 : 51] You can tell a good yarn. There's plenty who can do that. But so much of it has been replaced by almost this one-way communication. Just looking at a screen. And just absorbing things off a screen.

Instead of engaging with a good story. But here in this parable. And these parables, in fact, you find in chapter 15. You find Jesus engaging with a crowd.

He was the greatest storyteller ever. And he was telling the greatest story ever. The story of salvation. The story of hope for a lost and a perishing people.

And so here, as he tells these stories, these parables. They are stories that people could relate to. They were hearing these things being spoken about.

They were engaging with them. And Jesus taught them in this way to realize that he was so often talking about them. He was talking to them and about them.

[30 : 49] He was talking about the realities of their lives. And as you look at these three parables. We didn't read the first two at the beginning of chapter 15.

But you have three parables in this chapter. And they all link together. The parable of the lost sheep. The parable of the lost coin. And the parable, if you like, of the lost son.

The prodigal son. There's Jesus speaking about what it meant to be lost. But the great rejoicing that there is in being found.

And especially about being found by God. And the prodigal son, this story may be familiar to you. It's perhaps something you've read or heard on many some occasion.

And we know it so well. But what is it about? What is it that Jesus is telling us here? What's your immediate reaction as you read through this parable?

[31 : 50] Who is it about? And what is it speaking to us about? Our immediate reaction is so often to focus on this younger brother.

The prodigal son, as he's called. The one who goes away to live the life that he wants. Who goes away to live the way that he wants.

And how he begins to realize that he comes to himself and realizes how wrong he was. Or there's the older brother at the end of the parable too.

The older brother who was jealous. Who had lived in many ways, in his own eyes, such a good life. He'd honored his father unlike his younger brother.

But he too had something wrong. He had this jealous nature in him. We could look at that and maybe we will another time. But you see, there's these two sons. But who is the main character in this?

[32 : 49] Well, the main character is not the older brother or the younger brother called the prodigal son. The main character in this is the father. The prodigal father.

And that's why we really want to come and see. The father who shows this wonderful love, this wonderful grace towards both sons. He shows it to the younger son in the way he receives him back.

The way he shows him mercy. A father who welcomes his son home. And what Jesus is talking about in this parable is a reminder to all of his people of how our father in heaven longs to receive his children.

To welcome them home. He invites them. He calls on them. And he rejoices in them returning. That is what we see here. It's a wonderful welcome from a glorious father.

And so we want to look tonight and this evening together at this younger son as he comes to meet with the father. It's something we all need to hear.

[34 : 03] So that wherever we have been and whatever we have done, we will recognize that God can still welcome us home. That God still calls us to himself.

That this is the embrace that we should all long for. The embrace of our father who is in heaven. But we begin to see in this parable first of all the young son.

And we see at the start, first two things about him is his request and his recklessness. The kind of attitude that this young son has is an attitude perhaps many of us can relate to.

How many of us can relate to this younger brother? He is like so many since the time of Jesus telling this parable. Telling this story to them.

How many generations of sons and daughters have just the same kind of heart as this younger brother? We think and we think everything is better away from God.

[35 : 12] Everything will be so much better if I can just get away from this word of God. From this God that maybe my parents have been forcing onto me. This God that I've heard so much about growing up. I just want to get away from this God.

This younger brother is just like so many since. And so many who will still come in God's will. We just want to go and do our own thing.

We want to go and do it in our own way. If you've ever watched the movie Braveheart. It's a movie that's almost becoming older.

Every year goes past so long ago now since it first came out. There was a phrase used towards the end of that film that kept being repeated.

A word that so many people were looking for and longing for. And the word was freedom. It's a word that gets cried out towards the end of the film.

[36 : 13] Freedom. People just longing for freedom. And you can almost imagine this younger son. This is the word that he's crying out for.

He's looking for his freedom. He's looking to find his freedom in life. And this freedom he wants no matter what. No matter what the cost.

He wants this freedom. He wants to be his own boss. He wants to do his own thing. Not to be told do this or don't do that.

He's had enough. He's sick of all of this. He wants his freedom. He wants to get away. But when you see his request as he says in verse 12.

The younger of them said to his father. Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. Give me what I will be due.

[37 : 16] Give me saying now what one day will be mine. And it shows us just how serious this request is.

What he is wanting is what he would expect to receive when his father passed away. But he's saying, I want it now. And behind what he's saying is.

Father, I wish you were dead. I wish you were dead so I could have what will be mine one day. I wish you were dead so I could go and enjoy my life to the full.

The seriousness of his request and his recklessness towards life. The son would get his inheritance one day.

But he wants it now. And how does that relate to us today? How would that relate to the crowd that Jesus was preaching to here?

[38 : 22] What would they see and what should we see in this? Well, Jesus is showing the people. This is your attitude towards God. When this is your heart.

When this is your desire in life. Just to get away from God. No matter what. To flee away thinking that everything is going to be so much better.

What you are saying is. God, I wish you were dead. I wish I didn't have you in my life in this way. I wish I didn't feel this burden of sin that I so often feel.

I want to be free. I want to be away from all of this. God, I want you dead. It's like so many of us.

Maybe we have been. Maybe we are like this. We are just tired of all the do's and don'ts. The do's and don'ts of what we see as a religion.

[39 : 25] A religion that is there just to spoil our life. To weigh heavy upon us. And what you notice is. The father gives him what he wants.

He gives him this. He gives him all that he is longing for. Even though his heart would be breaking in it. He gives it to the son. And what does the son do?

He goes away to enjoy himself. Or so he thinks. His lifestyle here in verse 13. Is described as reckless living.

Not many days later. The younger son gathered all he had. Took a journey into a far country. And there he squandered his property. In reckless living.

He blew the lot. He thought he was going to enjoy himself. And maybe for a time. He felt like he was. He spent everything. Literally means he just threw it in the wind.

[40 : 29] He threw it all away. And he's called the prodigal son. Because the word prodigal. One of its meaning is. Spending money or using resources recklessly.

And that's what he's doing. He squandered his property. And reckless living. That's why he's called the prodigal son. And here you see him.

Running away from God. Looking for joy and happiness. Fulfillment. In a far off country. Thinking I can get away from God.

Hoping to be able to cry. I am free. I have found my freedom. My freedom. But what did he find? He found the emptiness of this life.

He found just how there was nothing there for him. In verse 14. When he had spent everything. A severe famine arose. And he began to be in need.

[41 : 29] He had everything. And now he's got nothing. Running away from the father. Seems for a time. All is well and good.

But ultimately. We're never free. And we're never away from God. And we may look at that as a negative. But we should really see it.

As such a positive. And such a blessing. That the father is still. Watching for us. And you can imagine. Jesus telling this story.

This parable. And the crowd. The hearers. They're shocked. By the behavior of this younger son. And they would have been. To think maybe at this point.

That Jesus is going to tell them. What happens to those. Who do bad things. How Jesus is going to tell. How the father is going to deal. So harshly with his son.

[42 : 29] Who has treated him in this way. And they're maybe just. Starting to sit up a little. At this point. And listening to what Jesus is saying. Hoping that they. Think that what they're going to hear.

Is this. But not so. Jesus is going to turn. This story on its head. For them. We come to see that.

In a moment. But when you think of this. Prodigal son. How can you relate. To him. And another man. Who had just this.

Kind of attitude. And his name. Was John Newton. And on the back of your. Notice sheet. You can read. About John Newton. If you haven't already done. So do it.

When you go home. Because it's 250 years. Since. The words of. Amazing grace. Were first read. Publicly. On the 1st of January. 1773.

[43 : 25] 1773. It was John Newton who wrote these words of amazing grace, a hymn that's been sung on many occasions since. And the wonder of those words still echo today, amazing grace. And part of that hymn, it has these words, I once was lost, but now I'm found. And you can see how that relates to the son here. In verse 24, it says, the father says, for this my son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. So you see there, the son, he was as good as dead. Just like John Newton himself, who ran away from God, who was in the slave trade, captain of a ship, a foul mouth, drinking heavily, no thought or interest in God until God took hold of him. Until he came to know the amazing grace of God. The interesting thing about John Newton was he had a good mother.

A mother who prayed for him so often and had taught him of a savior who could save anyone. And John Newton, even though he had gone so far away from God, he came to know that amazing grace, just like this prodigal son. Just like me. And just like many of you, I'm sure, you have known this amazing grace. Dead, but made alive in Christ. So you have this request and recklessness of the prodigal son. But then we come to see just how the story changes. And we see it in the reality and returning of this son. The son, instead of finding freedom, what did he find? He found the life of freedom and joy he thought he would have. It wasn't so. As the saying goes, the grass isn't always greener on the other side. And this son, he squandered his living. He had nothing. And where does he find himself? He finds himself feeding pigs in this far off country. The lowest kind of work that he could find, that he could know. Feeding pigs. Longing even just to have one of the pods that the pigs ate, but they gave him nothing. He had nothing. He had no one to help him. This famine came and his hope was gone. And you can imagine the crowd gathered hearing Jesus sharing this story, waiting now for judgment to be pronounced. This is what happens if this is the kind of life you live. This is a story coming to a conclusion in their eyes, where he's going to get what he deserves. But it's not what they expected. Jesus, having made this point, he begins to turn the story around. And this is the gospel. This is the good news. The son who stands condemned and hopeless, Jesus begins to show that there is a way back. What could he do? Well, look at what it says in verse 17.

But 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. He comes to himself. The story doesn't end with the situation of the prodigal in complete disarray. It doesn't end with him in among the pigs, longing to eat some of their food. It turns. It says, he came to himself. Grace awoke him.

The Lord awoke him in the midst of being in this pit of despair, as we heard of this morning. And here he is. He knows his father has something better for him. This is the beginning of the prodigal repenting. He comes to himself. He realizes how far away he's gone. But he realizes too that there is still hope. He had forgotten so much for so long. But he hadn't forgotten his father. And he hadn't forgotten his father's house. And so he ups and comes back. And for many of us here, or many of us around ourselves here, this is where we need to come to, to realize that it is to come to our senses and to return to the God who we may be shunned, mocked and put away and run away from for so long. Realizing the emptiness of life without him, to come to the Father. How many of us have longed to get away from home. Away from the binds of church. Away from the binds of everything else it entails. And only to realize we were so blessed to have it. And to realize the sorrow that there is without it. But the Father still says to come home.

[49 : 35] To return. He may have gone the wrong way. But he realizes there's a way back. And there's one way back.

With the storm last night and this morning. It wasn't maybe a surprise to hear this morning with the high tides and the strong winds that the braai was closed. But what was maybe a surprise to many was the way it was reported. Where people were told to find an alternative route to use. It caused a few chuckles, I'm sure, I'm sure, around the place. Whoever wrote it didn't realize that there's only one road in and out.

There's one way. And it was closed. And when we look at the son here, there was one way. He'd gone away from the Father. And there was no other way back. There was no alternative route to take.

But the way was open. The road was not blocked. And the Father was there. And as you see in verse 18, it says, I will arise and go to my Father. And I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. And this is the way back. The way that is open to sinners through Christ.

To come in repentance. Father, I have sinned against you. And the wonder is, would the way you see the Father come? The Son turns to go home. The final thing we see here is this reunion and rejoicing.

[51 : 28] It says in verse 20, What does he get? He gets everything again. Everything and more. He gets the Father's love.

He gets the best robe. He gets a fine ring. He gets shoes. He gets the fatted calf. He gets everything. And he didn't deserve it. He knows it. But this is the wonder of God's amazing grace that gives us all. He deserves nothing. He deserves nothing. In many ways, maybe he didn't want anything.

He says, if I could just maybe be a servant in my Father's house, that would be enough. But he gets restored. The expectation of the crowd here would be that the Father would give him what they thought he deserved.

A punishment. That he would soon sort him out. But what you find here is a prodigal father.

for just like the son is known as the prodigal son who spent everything extravagantly. Prodigal means to waste everything in that way but prodigal also has a second meaning.

[53 : 13] And it's this that we see in the prodigal father for it also means giving something on a lavish scale. And that's what the father does.

The father is doing, he is looking for the son and he lavishes his love on him. He gets the best.

What do you make of this? How do you understand this yourself? The crowd probably thought he's going far too far with this.

The son doesn't deserve any of this. Look at what he's done. He's wasted everything his father gave him already and here he is giving him more.

What a waste. A waste for that ungrateful son. And this is what Jesus wants them and wants us to realize.

[54 : 16] The wonder of this grace is that the father longs to give us more if we will but come to him. And for ourselves this evening, it's about coming to look at this parable, to look at this story, to see ourselves in it, to see that we have, just like the prodigal son, we've run away from God.

We've all maybe turned and gone our own way and wanted to do our own thing. And maybe we've forgotten the love of his amazing grace.

Maybe we've been a Christian for so long, we've lost sight of this wonder of God's amazing love towards us. Maybe we've been wasting this love that he's shown to us, not just as unconverted people, but as converted people, that we haven't lived for God.

We haven't given out all for God. Maybe we too have become reckless in the way we live. But God is calling us to come.

Whatever stage we're at, whatever place we're in in this world where we've never believed or whether we've believed for years to come and to know the wonder of this grace.

[55 : 45] We can all waste so much time in this world. We can all squander so much in this world. But the parable is teaching us to always have our focus on our Father in heaven and the love that he has shown for us.

And that as we do that, even in our wasting so much, he is still able to bless and restore us and help us to love him all the more.

A former free church minister sadly passed away a few years ago, John McLean, who was ministering Kilmour and Skye. In December 2018, he was doing supply preaching down in South Uist.

During his stay there, he wrote the words of a poem. And the poem was called Those Wasted Years. I'm going to quote two of the verses, but if you can, look it up and read it all.

There's wonderful words in them. But these two verses I want to share with you this evening. In one verse he says, How often did you hear him speak?

[56 : 58] And you just closed your ears. With others lost, then you will say, O Lord, those wasted years. There's a challenge for us in these words.

How often did you hear him speak? And you just closed your ears. Don't let tonight or these days be times when you close your ears to God's speaking.

Otherwise, as it says, with others lost, then you will say, O Lord, those wasted years. The parable here reminds us of a son who went away and squandered his life, who wasted those years.

But the last verse of the poem says this. But now let's think of promises and trust them more and more. The Lord has told us in his word, those years I can restore.

The wonder of his amazing grace. That as we come back to him, he is able to restore. To restore those wasted years.

[58 : 13] So whatever stage we're at, how many years we've wasted, the Lord is able to restore. That's what this parable reminds us of.

The prodigal son went away looking for freedom. found there was none there, returned undeserving of any mercy, but found a father who showed extravagant love through his love and grace.

It's a time we came to our senses. It's a time for us to return to the father, that he may restore those wasted years.

May God bless his word to us. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 103, the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 103, page 370. We're going to sing from verse 11 to verse 13.

[59 : 23] For as the heaven in its height, the earth surmounted far, so great to those that do him fear his tender mercies are. As far as east is distant from the west, so far hath he.

From us removed in his love all our iniquity. Such pity as a father hath, and to his children dear. Like pity shows, the Lord to such as worship him in fear.

We'll sing these three verses. Psalm 103, verse 11 to 13, to God's praise, and the tune is Kilmarnock. Psalm 103, and the tune is Kilmarnock.

For as the heaven in its height, the earth surmounted far, so great to those that do him fear, his tender mercies are.

As far as east is distant from the west, so far hath he.

[60 : 47] From us recovered in his love all our iniquity.

Such pity as the father hath, unto his children dear.

Like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left. We'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore.

Amen.