

Our Father Welcomes Repentant Sinners

Lk 15:1-24 (text: 15:11-24)

5 May 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

There's a reason why our Lord tells these three parables!

Here it is:

You see, v.1& 2 tell us that many tax collectors & sinners came to Jesus, because He had first shown them love! He did what was unheard of in that culture! Yes, He did not just *associate* with sinners; no, He sat down and *ate* with them! Well, to *this* the Pharisees and law-teachers reacted with sour faces and in greatest disgust saying, "***This man receives sinners and eats with them!***"¹

Indeed, it's clear: the Pharisees & law-teachers did not remember what Jesus once told them, i.e. "***It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.***"²

So, by way of these three parables, Jesus now reminds them that He has come for the exact purpose to seek & save the lost – sinners, yes, also sinners like you & me!³

My brother & sister, let's take note of this: You see, every time the Bible talks of a sinner – of some Bible character who has done something stupid – you & I would do well to place ourselves in that person's shoes, for look, let's be honest, that's what we are, sinners who need to see & learn from the Bible how God deals with the likes of us!

Well, here's the main message of our text: My brother/sister (young man/woman), are you really sorry for your sins? **Then, turn around from that sin (repent), and don't be afraid to turn back to your heavenly Father, for, if you turn to the Father with a contrite heart, then, of *this* you can be sure: He will receive you with open arms!**

Well, our text allows for us these three points...

- Rocking the Boat
- Rock-bottom
- Returning Home to a Great Welcome

Rocking the Boat

The young man of our text wanted freedom – he wanted to be free from the restraints of his parental home, freedom from the watchful eyes of all who knew him, all who could hold him to account!

And he knew that, to carry out his plan, he needed money.

¹ Lk 15:1&2 ***Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."***

² Lk 5:31-32 (NIV)

³ Here is part of a longer introduction I had at first:

"So, to make His empathy for the lost plain to those cold & heartless religious critics, Jesus tells them three parables – and He tells the three in ascending order!

Yes, firstly He tells how a shepherd did his utmost to go bring back *just 1%* of sheep that was lost. Then, He tells of a housewife who did her utmost to retrieve not just 1% but *10%* of her cash! Lastly, He tells them how a father keenly waited & prayed not for 1% neither for 10% of what was dear to him, but for *50%*. Besides, what this father so keenly prayed for and waited for with great expectation was not an *animal* or a *thing*! No, this time, it was for his own *flesh-and-blood son!*"

And he also knew the law of Dt 21:17 – that after his father’s death, his older brother would get two-thirds of the inheritance and he, the younger one, one-third!⁴

But, in his sinful, selfish, and greedy heart, he has decided that he wants his full share now – and all in cash!

But here’s a problem: You see, whilst it is indeed so that, in Bible times, a father, while still alive, could make a *gift* to his children,⁵ this young man is not interested in just a gift; no, he wants his entire inheritance, and he wants it now – instant gratification!

Did he not care about the fact that parts of the estate had to be sold & converted into cash so he could have his third?

Did he not care that he was grieving his father – that he was an insult to his father’s love ... that his actions were for all practical purposes saying, “Dad, I wish you were dead!”?

My brother & sister, unlike the lost sheep and the lost coin (of the first two parables) – this son had a mind of his own. You see, he’s a human being – a rational being (not a sheep, and not a coin) – no a human being who, like you & me, lives by his own convictions! And, by his stubborn sinfulness, he wants to go live in extravagance!

So, he does the unheard-of thing! Yes, he “rocks the boat!” Can you believe it – he has the cheek to demand his inheritance from his father!

And here’s the amazing thing: the father lets him have it!

You see, sadly, there comes a point in time when even a *caring* parent can no longer keep a rebellious young-adult child at home, but has to let him go so that, hopefully (prayerfully), he will go bump his head and come to his senses!

So, the father lets him go!

Our heavenly Father does the same. He, at times, gives us rope – gives us so much rope – that we will come to the point of nearly hanging ourselves – the point of desperation when, by God’s grace, we’re ready to receive Him!

Well, v. 13 says, soon after,⁶this young freedom seeker took all he had & left.

He went to a far country – far from the eyes of anyone who knew him – so that he could go do his own thing!

Do you & I do this? Did you know that, for you & me, the far country does not necessarily mean a distant place to which we must travel; no, for you & me “far country” may simply mean that we stay just where we are, going the normal busy routine from home to work to pleasure, then back to home, and all the time *putting our Heavenly Father on the “backburner” of our lives* – living as though He does not see nor matters nor even exists!!

Well, that’s what this boy does – literally & spiritually!

And he shocks & hurts his whole household! Yes, he “rocks the boat!” He gets his own sinful way – a way that’s bound to lead to disaster – which brings us to point 2...

Rock-bottom

⁴ Dt 21:15-17 (especially v.17), “***If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, ¹⁶ then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn, ¹⁷ but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his***” (Emphasis mine).

⁵ Cf. e.g. Gen 25:5 & 6 (especially v.6) ***Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. ⁶ But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country*** (Emphasis mine).

⁶ cf. v.13 “not many days later” (NASB) καὶ μετ’ οὐ πολλὰς ἡμέρας

Well, v.13 says that, there in that far country, this young man *squandered his wealth*⁷ *in wild⁸ living* (NIV) – *loose living* (NASB); *reckless living* (ESV); *prodigal living* (NKJV); *debauchery* (as some older translations say).

Look just how unrestrained the young man of our text was: at first he took *all* he had (he left nothing behind in safekeeping); then, when it came to spending, again, he left nothing untouched – nothing that he could fall onto in case his plan did not work out & he wanted to return home. He went flat-out in the wrong direction! He left no assets in a safe place! And, look *now*! You see, v. 14 tells us that, just when he had spent everything,⁹ then bad turned into worse, for a severe famine came in that *far-away* country!

Thus, 1) due to his own fault & 2) due to things beyond his control, this young man began to be in need/want/lack!¹⁰

Would he turn around now and go back to his father?

Sadly, no! Still too proud! You see, “Pride is made of stone. Hard knocks may chip it, but it takes a sledgehammer to break it.”¹¹

So, this young man still does not turn around!

No, now he hires himself out!

So far has he fallen that he goes & works for someone harsher than his father!

But wait! There’s more! For look at this Jew’s job! He’s now feeding *pigs*, and *that* despite the well-known saying of his times: “*May a curse come upon the man who cares for pigs!*”¹²

Well, what else gets now added to his humiliation?

Hunger!!

Yes, now this young man wants to even eat some of the carob pods¹³ which were given to the pigs (v.16)!

How the giants have fallen!!

So, finally, he reaches rock-bottom!

Well, every parable has a turning point!

You see, the first parable’s turning point came when, after lots and lots of toil, trouble & sweat, the loving shepherd finally finds his lost sheep, lifts him up onto his neck, clasps its paws tightly in front of his chest/chin, and carries it home, rejoicing!!

And the turning point in the parable of the lost coin came when the housewife, having lit her lamp, taken her broom, swept her dirt floor (for that was the kind of floor they used to

⁷ καὶ ἐκεῖ διεσκορπίσεν τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ (aor in act 3 s of διασκορπίζω **1.scatter**, seed or sheep or a population (Mt 25:24, 26; 26:31; Mk 14:27; Lk 1:51; Jn 11:52; Ac 5:37+); **2.squander**, wasted (Lk 15:13; 16:1+)

⁸ ζῶν ἀσώτως (prs ptc m s nom of ζάω, and adv ἀσώτως **recklessly**, wildly, in debauchery, in dissipation (Lk 15:13+). Liddell & Scott (1972:111) – dissolutely, i.e. unrestrained; Afrikaans: “losbandig; onsedelik.”)

⁹ δαπανήσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ πάντα (aor ptc act m s gen abs of δαπανάω **1.spend**, pay expenses (Mk 5:26; Lk 15:14; Ac 21:24+); **2.waste** (Jas 4:3+); **3. LN 42.27 exert effort** (2Co 12:15+)). Lit. “Now him having wasted all ...”

¹⁰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἤρξατο ὑστερεῖσθαι (prs inf pass of ὑστερέω **1. be in need**, be destitute, lack (Lk 22:35; 2Co 11:9; Heb 11:37); **2. lack benefit**, lack an advantage (1Co 8:8); **3. be inferior**, be in a state of low status (1Co 12:24); **4. fail to attain**, fall short (1Co 1:7)

¹¹ Well-said words of Lucado, M. 2004. Six hours one Friday. Nashville, Dallas : Thomas Nelson. p.79

¹² Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.753)

¹³ The pl of κεράτιον, ου, τό **carob pod** (Lk 15:16+) . Also, cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carob_tree which indicates that this plant, growing along the Mediterranean, was, among other, used as sweetener in the days before sugar cane or sugar beet was discovered. People would normally eat the pod without its seed. Carob is still eaten or drunk during some Jewish and Muslim feasts.

have in those days), finally sees that precious silver thing glittering in her dustpan, and bursts out saying, ***‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’***¹⁴

Well, here’s the turning point in our parable – here where v.17 says, “...***he came to himself, and said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger...’***”¹⁵

“He came to himself...”

Note: he came *to* himself but not *by* himself!¹⁶

My brother & sister, do you remember what our Lord once told Peter there at Caesarea Philippi – yes, there where the discussion was about the fact that, despite overwhelming evidence, so many people (including even some religious leaders) just would not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God? Christ had asked His disciples, “But *you*, who do *you* say that I am!?” Then Peter answered, “***You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!***”

Then? How did Christ respond?

This way: “***Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.***”¹⁷

Our text says (that) this young man ***came to himself!*** Yes, but not *by* himself!

It was the Holy Spirit that wrought that change of heart in him!

You see, you may study the Bible with your head! You may get a doctorate in theology!

You may understand with your head everything about Christ’s atoning death for sinners, but if you have not in humility & broken-heartedness received Christ by the inworking of the Holy Spirit, all your high efforts will be futile!

But this young man came to himself – and he came to himself because of the Holy Spirit’s work!

You see, here’s the difference between the lost sheep and lost coin (on the one hand) and the lost son (on the other hand): the lost sheep & coin couldn’t come back by their own feet. They were an animal that had strayed too far to find the way back, and a thing that didn’t have any feet nor brain, nor heart nor will! But, as for the lost son – the father did not go after him, for, as human being, this son (just like you & I) had a mind of his own, and a heart that needed to be changed. Therefore, the father was waiting for him – not that the father’s waiting was carefree in any way!¹⁸

So, yes, you can go grab an *animal* back, and you can go grab a *thing* (coin) back, but you can’t go grab a human being back against his will! No, he needs to have a change of heart or else you might go grab him and bring him back into your home, in which case his *body* (he in person) might be home, but his heart won’t be there – for it has not yet changed!

Look, was that not exactly the problem with the prodigal’s older brother!?

Indeed, because the sheep & the coin (in the first two parables) were *things*, they did not have a means of bringing themselves back. Therefore do those two parables explain that the shepherd and the housewife toiled & sweated searching for them, got them and brought them back – a *small picture* of how our heavenly Father, at great cost, sent His Son right into our sin-drenched world to come actively seek & find lost me & you!

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 15:9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁵ ESV (Emphasis mine)

¹⁶ Well-said by RC Sproul, for which cf. Sproul’s audio sermon on Luke 15:11-32 – a sermon called, “The Lost Son (Part 2),” at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/lost-son-part-2/>

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 16:17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁸ This is clear by the way the father receives him back!

So, don't think the *heavenly* Father did not hear the prayers of the prodigal's father; and that God had no share in the prodigal's return! I mean, who works repentance? Is it not the Father!?

My brother & sister, once, after a man got rehabilitated from enslavement to alcohol, he asked his pastor,¹⁹ "Pastor, why did God allow me to fall so deeply into my alcohol enslavement – yes, up to the point that I've lost my job, all my friends, my honour, and nearly also my wife?" "Why did God not stop me sooner!?" To which the pastor replied, "Brother, God often allows for his sinning loved-ones a long rope so that they can vividly see the reality of hanging themselves – yes, so that they can come to rock-bottom and turn around crying out to their Saviour!"

Well, I wonder how much it would take for some people to come to themselves (to their senses) – would rock-bottom for them be bankruptcy, homelessness, pain, an accident, a prison cell, or the death of a loved one? You see, some won't turn to Christ even when they're on their deathbed! Yes, regarding some (I hope none of us) the words of Rm 2:4 apply, "...*do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*"²⁰

To my own shame, I have to confess that it was stubborn migration to New Zealand, followed by years of lack of good work, which God used to bring me to the point of turning back to Him!

But I love what the Apostle Paul says (in 2 Cor 7:10), *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

How about you?

Well, this brings us to the last point...

Returning & Rejoicing

The prodigal hit the nail bang-on-the-head when he concluded that his decision to leave home was not just stupid/unwise, but a *sin*!

A sin committed against whom?

His father?

More – against *Heaven* (i.e. God)²¹

I still remember how absolutely stunned & overwhelmed I was when our youngest daughter, at the age of only five, after I had disciplined her for some very naughty deed, lay sobbing on my chest and said, "Dad, can you pray to God & ask Him to forgive me?" This child, already at the age of five, knew that sin against mum & dad, is primarily sin against her heavenly Father!²²

Well, here's another beautiful thing this born-again prodigal can now clearly see (v.19), i.e. that he is no longer worthy to be his father's son! He has forfeited his place in the family!

Yet, resolutely, this young man started on his journey back! If only he could become his father's servant!

And the walk back could not have been easy, for, remember, was he not in a *far* country!?

¹⁹ My beloved "Dominee" in South Africa, Dominee Hannes Strümpfer in the early 1990's.

²⁰ Rm 2:4

²¹ Sure, Hendriksen (ibid:754) is right when he says, "Hebrews often substituted the word *heaven* for God."

²² Our youngest child, c.2001 in Te Atatu Peninsula, Auckland.

And, yes, when he once came, he still had the money to hire a donkey or to come by carriage! But now he's penniless! He's probably even bare feet and in rags!²³ And, because of poverty, he had little opportunity to take a bath. So, he stinks! Besides, he has the smell of pigs on him! But his heart is new, and he is convicted & convinced and resolute to finish the long distance back to his father!

My brother & sister, how good is that stage in your life when your desperation for your Father is one notch higher than your dignity!²⁴

Well, little did this young man know that his loving father had never lost interest in his wayward son! No, from the farmhouse, the father has always been scanning the horizon to see whether his son is not perhaps coming home!

Well, in one of his programmes in the series Focus on the Family, Dr James Dobson once told of many a parent who left the outside front-door light always burning in the hope that a prodigal son/daughter would return! Well, that's just an outward sign of the tear-filled prayers that have gone heavenwards inside that house! I know of at least two separate couples in the RCNZ who have done exactly that until, finally (and after 15 years), their daughters came home!

Verse 20 tells us the prodigal's father spotted his son already from a distance!²⁵

Look at the father's fourfold action:

- Verse 20 says this father has compassion²⁶ – yes, in his chest he experiences that enormously strong moving feeling!
- He runs²⁷ – although, for his age it is not dignified to run! But he couldn't care less!
- He throws his arms around his son's neck²⁸ – embraces him ... which shows that the father has already in his heart forgiven his son!
- He kisses²⁹ his son – with gusto!³⁰

Well, as the father pours out his love, the son says as much as, “Dad, wait! I'm not worthy of being your son! I stink! I'm in rags! I'm impure – worked with pigs!” ***Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.***”

The father's joy does not even allow for the son to say all he had resolved to say, i.e. “... ***make me like one of your hired men!***”³¹

What welcoming father!

What humble son!

²³ Gauging by his father's orders to the servant (in v.22)

²⁴ Saying from Lucado (ibid:110)

²⁵ “Ἐτι δὲ αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ Lit. And/Now/But him still being a distance away, his father saw him ...

²⁶ aor ind dep of σπλαγχνίζομαι **feel compassion for**, have pity on, have one's heart go out to someone (Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mk 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Lk 7:13; 10:33; 15:20+)

²⁷ δραμῶν 2nd aor ptc act m s nom of τρέχω **1.run**, implying speed or haste (Lk 15:20; Heb 12:1; Rev 9:9; Mt 28:9 v.r.; Ac 19:28 v.r.); **2.try to do**, strive, give effort (Ro 9:16); **3.progress** in one's behavior or conduct (Gal 5:7); **4.λόγος τρέχει (logos trechei)**, message spread (2Th 3:1+)

²⁸ ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ Lit. he fell on his neck ...

²⁹ aor ind act 3 s of καταφιλέω **kiss** (Mt 26:49; Mk 14:45; Lk 7:38, 45; 15:20; Ac 20:37+); Bauer (1979:420) “Kiss someone in greeting or in farewell.” Liddell & Scott (1972:363) “kiss tenderly, caress.”

³⁰ This Greek word has the prefix kata (**κατά**), which always indicates force/gusto in some or other way. From there the translation by Liddell & Scott (cf. previous footnote).

³¹ Cf. verse 19

You see, nobody ever comes into heaven in pride, haughtiness or in presumption: “Hi, you angels, here I am! You couldn’t wait to receive me, hey!?”

No, it’s only in a God-worked humility (and contrition of heart) that you/I (anyone) will enter heaven!

But the father orders: come bring him the best robe.

You see, this son cannot enter his father’s home in filthy rags!

Neither can you & I enter heaven in our filthy “rags”!

No, we have to be clothed by the robe of righteousness earned for us by Jesus!

My brother & sister (young person), are you really sorry for your sins? But, do you doubt the Father’s love, forgiveness & welcoming?

Look what our Heavenly Father did for you – He actively and graciously, sent His Son to take away your sin! Yes, the Father de-robed His own Son on the cross until He was totally naked – symbol of clothing Him with our sin.

And so?

Well, in doing that, the Father clothed His beloved repentant sinners (you & me?) with His Son’s perfect (yes, sinless) robe!

Is that not what God’s Word says (in Gal 3:27), “***For all of you who were baptised into Christ*** (i.e. all who received Jesus in faith through heart-surrender) ***have clothed yourselves with Christ!***”?

My brother & sister (dear children), how long will you wait?

Come! Come in brokenness! Lay your sins before Him! He is faithful and just! He will forgive you your sins and welcome you with open arms!

AMEN (2,977 words excluding footnotes)