

# Heavenly Joy over Earthly Repentance

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[ 0 : 00 ] We come to a day that has been set aside in our country called Father's Day.

! I believe, and I wish I'd done a little more research, I believe it was actually signed! into law. By President Nixon, so it's not too terribly old as far as a holiday.

I did some online research preparing for today's message and I discovered some amazing facts. There is something like 690 million messages that were designed to be preached for mothers on Mother's Day.

I think I found three messages for men on Father's Day and all three said, men, you can do better. Now take your wife and kids to lunch.

[ 1 : 13 ] And that was pretty much it. And I apologize in advance, we normally don't have water up here, but that medicine really makes me dry.

But we do have in the pages of Scripture, I think a brilliant Father's Day message delivered to us and to the church in every age by the Lord Jesus Christ.

We find that in the 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel. And I'm going to be going through verses 11 to 32. I'm not going to comment on every verse.

I'm not going to comment on every verse. We'd be here until next Father's Day. Now, it is in the form of a parable. It is delivered by the Lord Jesus himself.

And the most common name for this parable is the parable of the prodigal son.

[ 2 : 29 ] And we should note that even the secular, unbelieving world has labeled this parable as brilliant literature, powerful drama, and the greatest short story ever told.

And even though it is referred to as the story of the prodigal son, in truth, it is a message of a loving and merciful father who lavishes grace upon a son totally undeserving of the same.

Let me read to you that section of Scripture. It is a little lengthy, but I think it is important. Jesus is talking and he said, A man had two sons.

The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me. Let me add this because I don't think it is in my notes.

That was a fairly nice way of saying, You are not dying fast enough. Give me my share of the will. That is what he said.

[ 4 : 01 ] So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country.

And there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country. And he began to be impoverished.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country. And he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

He may have been the only Jewish boy on earth at that time working in a swine field. They didn't do that. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating and no one was giving him anything.

But when he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger.

[ 5 : 04 ] I will get up and go to my father and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Make me as one of your hired men. So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. He didn't finish, did he?

But the father said to his slaves, Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet and bring the fatted calf, kill it and let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found. And they begin to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field.

[ 6 : 10 ] And when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.

And he said to him, Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him back safe and sound. But he became angry and was not willing to go in.

And his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, Look, for so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours. And yet you have never given me a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him.

And he said to him, Son, you've always been with me. And all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice.

[ 7 : 17 ] For this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live. He was lost and has been found.

What a parable. The images and nuances of this powerful story are practically limitless.

I have no doubt that messages could be prepared and preached on this parable throughout the summer. And perhaps to the end of the year.

I personally have long believed that we actually have two prodigals in this story. Obviously the younger brother and the older brother.

Based on the way he reacted. Both were disobedient to their father. Both had departed from the father's face. The faith which with he had raised them.

[ 8 : 21 ] The theme in this message is that of heavenly joy over earthly repentance. Heavenly joy over earthly repentance.

This is a vitally important message. And it is one that is substantially missing from the pulpits today. In fact the message of repentance goes far beyond important.

Because genuine repentance is an absolute essential to genuine salvation. It is essential. Mark this thought down in your mind and in your heart.

Absent repentance there is no salvation. And listen to how the Lord Jesus described this truth in Luke chapter 15 verse 7.

But this is how important it is. I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

[ 9 : 24 ] Than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. That is an amazing description of the topic and the theme of repentance.

When the younger brother finally came to his senses. He journeyed back home. I have no doubt that all the way home he practiced what was on his heart and on his mind.

Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. And am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Make me like one of your hired servants. He had that down pat. Totally memorized. But he kept going over and over.

Even I think verbalizing it. He kept telling him when he met people in the world. What is he saying? What is he talking about? But Jesus tells us some very interesting things here, doesn't he?

[ 10 : 36 ] He tells us that when the boy was a great way off. Mark that down. When he was a great way off.

The father saw him. And in an exercise of love and compassion. Ran to him.

And fell on his neck and kissed him. The moment had arrived. Now was the time. The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment.

The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment.

The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment.

The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment. The moment.

The moment. one of your hired servants, the father takes command of the situation, and he lavishes upon this boy love and grace and forgiveness. Now, we are reading this story, and we're looking at it this morning almost two decades into the 21st century. I guess we're in the second decade, but this parable was tailor-made for the Middle Eastern agrarian culture of the first century.

[12:07] That's when Jesus is telling this parable. The audience for this parable in Luke are the Pharisees and the scribes, the religious elite of Israel. These were the men who truly believed they had no need of grace, they had no need of mercy, they had earned their position in the culture, and they thought they had earned a future position in heaven.

These men in that position were typically wealthy, they were well-educated, they were men of power, they served as rulers and judges over the masses of what they would call the ignorant peasants of the nation. In their minds, God had already recognized how essential these men were to his plan and appointed them to be co-rulers with himself. I remember watching a movie about the life of Jesus, and while we can't prove this from Scripture, I can only imagine it happening when they brought Jesus before the Sanhedrin in trial, and in the movie version, Nicodemus said, have we considered the possibility that this man is the Messiah?

And the high priest spoke up and said, do you think God would send the Messiah without checking with me first? That was the attitude. That was the attitude of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and let me include the scribes in that as well.

So Jesus is telling this story to Pharisees and scribes, the religious elite, the aristocrats, and they, hearing this story, internally, they are furious at this younger son. Furious. Took his share of the wealth, left, had to go to work on a pig farm. Furious. They're waiting for the hammer to fall with great anticipation. This boy had robbed his father of honor. He had shamed his father by his rebellion.

Now, in their mind, if the father had followed the protocol established in such a situation like this in Israel, he should never have met with the boy. Servants would have come to him and said, you're not going to believe this, but your son has just shown up. Well, you go outside and ask him what he wants. They come back, well, he wants to go to work for you. He's hungry. You tell him to have a seat out there. I'll be with him in a day or a week or a month. You let him sit outside for a while.

[15:31] Don't let him on my property. That was what the Pharisees expected to happen with this young boy. And instead, the reaction was totally different. They couldn't believe it. In the mind of the religious elite, there could be no instant reconciliation. And there could never be full reconciliation. In the mind of the Pharisees, the boy should have been banned from any fellowship with the family. He might be allowed eventually to work as a menial servant trying to earn enough money to pay back all that he had squandered of his father's wealth. But he would no longer, at least as a servant, face the prospect of starvation. But that was as far in the Pharisaic mind that the father's benevolence should go. And let me say to you, that is how human devised religion would react to this situation.

This is religion. Religion is defined as man's efforts to reach God, and it always fails. We know that. Christ is not religion. Christianity is not religion. That's Christ reaching down, God sending his son to reach down to us. This is religion in action. But how wrong human religion is when it comes to the true God? Who they don't know? We learn from the start of this parable that when the boy was far off, the father spotted him and ran to him. Now, we don't know how many months or even years that this boy was gone. But I'm going to suggest to you, from the day he left until the day he returned, the father kept glancing down the road, hoping against all hope his son would return.

One writer from a few hundred years ago said there was probably a hill on the father's estate, and every morning he would go up that hill and he would stand there looking down that road, looking miles down that road, praying to God the father, is this the day my son might return?

And the passage says when the father spotted him, he ran to his son. Don't let that fact escape your attention.

Noblemen, and that's what this father was, noblemen, Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, never ran.

[18:47] Never ran. Why not? When they ran, their robes, I started to wear a robe today, just to show, when I would run across the stage. The robe would fly up and expose their legs.

And in that culture, for a man to expose his legs was the height of shame. Men did not do that. We went through a course of period, many, many years ago, when women did not expose their legs, it was considered shame.

And now, in our culture, people expose everything, and no one thinks anything of it. There was another reason, though, that the father ran. He ran to this returning son, because the village, when they saw him, and finally identify him, and that was going to be difficult.

He was in tattered clothes, and he smelled like pigs. But eventually, they're going to make the connection. They're going to come after him. They're going to verbally abuse him.

They may even violently abuse him, because everyone knew what he had done to his father and to the family name. The father ran to embrace his son, because he loved him, but he's also protecting him.

[ 20 : 11 ] And let me suggest to you, the father is interceding for his son against what might happen in that village. Just like he intercedes, and we won't get to that today, with the older brother, and says, your brother was dead, and he's alive.

He intercedes. He's interceding for his son. So the father runs to prevent his son from being verbally or physically attacked by the righteous members of the town.

And by the way, you can't see it on my paper, but the word righteous is in quotation marks. What did Paul tell us in Romans? There's none righteous.

Not even one. Well, I'm glad it's only 20 after, and that gets my introduction out of the way. I would love to continue with the various nuances of this parable, but I need to hurry on to my conclusion. So what we learn from the father of a parable told 2,000 years ago, can we actually apply to our own lives in the 21st century?

[ 21 : 22 ] And I think we can. As shocking as it may sound, the parable of the prodigal son is not primarily about an errant son.

He's a piece of the story. It's not about the older brother, the hard-headed religious type that is devoid of grace and compassion. We've met people like that.

This parable is about a father. And oh, what a father he is. I just now wish I'd been a father like this one. The parable is about a father.

This is very important because Jesus was telling this story to the scribes and Pharisees who had no concept of the true God as father.

They wouldn't even refer to him as father. And they were so offended, or my father, they were so offended when Jesus said my father, they wanted to stone him to death for saying that.

[ 22 : 29 ] You know what other religion won't do that? Islam. Islam. I've been all over the Arab countries. Even during Ramadan, they are forbidden from referring to God as father or Allah as father.

These Pharisees had no concept of the true God as father. They had no concept of the father's son, the true Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, even though he's standing there talking to them.

There is a disconnect between the religious crowd and the prodigal's father. This father humbled himself even though it was the prodigal son who should be humbling himself.

And the crowd is amazed when Jesus says he ran to this sinning boy and embraced him for the reasons I've already described.

And remember, and I alluded to this earlier, this boy is in rags. I think it was Rembrandt who painted a beautiful portrait of this. I wish I'd gotten a copy for the fellows to put up and I didn't.

[ 23 : 46 ] But it's in St. Petersburg if you want to go see it in Russia. And this boy was in rags and he smelled like pigs. Nothing would be more abhorrent to a righteous Jew.

They don't handle pigs. They don't do it. Now, I'm confident and I know almost everybody in this room and I'm absolutely confident by now you realize that all of this and reality is a fitting picture of Christ.

This is a story about Christ. This is a story about God the Father. Jesus is telling the Pharisees and the scribes and Sadducees about God the Father whom they did not know.

He will later tell them your father is the devil. That's strong language. This is all about God the Father and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ humbled Himself to seek and save the lost. He endured the cross with all the shame attached to it by the religious crowd.

[ 25 : 06 ] The Pharisees and the Sadducees were at the foot of the cross mocking Him. Scorning Him. Wagging their tongues at Him which was a horrible thing to do in that culture.

Jesus took upon Himself the bitter scorn, the contempt, the mockery and the wrath that our sin fully deserved.

That was all part of taking our sins upon Himself. Though innocent, He bore our guilt.

Christ was teaching through this Father an amazing lesson on grace. The lesson still reverberates down through the corridors of time. This is a beautiful picture of forgiveness offered by the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

This is the gospel message. It's there. Here we see the sinner trying to devise a plan to work off His debt of sin.

[ 26 : 21 ] We call that system a system of works righteousness. And let me say, it permeates the religions of the world.

Works righteousness permeates the religions of the world. And dare I say this, it permeates many denominations in America.

Many denominations believe that salvation is an act of grace and works righteousness, a blending of the two. This is a system of works righteousness that the Lord Jesus is sternly condemning.

Our sins are far too egregious. we can do nothing to work off the sin debt. And when we try, we add debt to debt.

It is Christ who paid the debt in full for our sins. And here we see a portrait of Christ in this Father who moves in and embraces the sinner.

[ 27 : 34 ] pours out love upon him. And you can make that him us, can't you? And grants full forgiveness and reconciles us to God the Father.

Robert Murray McShane, the great Scottish preacher, we've been able to recover about 70 of his sermons. He died at age 30.

great person in the Puritan and Reformed vein. He said this, Jesus for us is all of the righteousness we will ever have before a holy God.

I trust, I pray that everyone in this room is saved and we're on a journey to stand before the Father. and the only righteousness that the Father will see in any one of us is the righteousness of Christ that because of his atoning sacrifice and because God saved us, he imputed to Christ our sins and imputed us the righteousness of Christ.

God the Father will not see my righteousness. You know why? Don't have any. He won't see yours, he will see the righteousness of Christ if you were one with him.

[ 29 : 12 ] We're not going to stand before God with one drop of our own, only that which was imputed to us to permit us to stand before such an awesome and holy God.

And this father was generous to his son. He gave his son sandals. Well, all right, why didn't he get him some Bostonians?

Well, I don't know, but he gave him sandals. That's what they wore in those days. Sandals were an expression of sonship.

this was an expression, you're back in the family. Why would sandals do that? Hired servants and slaves went barefoot all the time.

They didn't wear sandals. Family members wore sandals. They had a foot covering. So the father gives him sandals to put on.

[ 30 : 18 ] He's telling him a message here. My son's not going barefoot. My servants do. My slaves do. My son's not going barefoot. And he gives him a robe.

The father's robe. And what a robe it must have been. Beautiful. This is a tremendous gift.

Every nobleman had this ornate robe. And it was this mark of respect. It was this beautiful robe.

Everyone knew the family robe of this family. And by giving him this robe, he is piling honor on his son.

He's covering up the tattered clothes, the smell of pigs, with this beautiful ornate robe. robe. And then he gives him a ring.

[ 31 : 17 ] Puts a ring on his finger. How important that is. This is the gift of authority. The ring had on it the family crest.

This was a seal. And if you wanted to transact business, and this man was a businessman and a wealthy one. And if you wanted to transact business, you did so by taking your ring, making a contract, you would take that ring in some softened wax, press it down, and it would give the signet of that ring.

That was the contract. And only the family members had the authority to transact business in that way. This son, from that moment, can go out into the village now.

And transact business. I've got the ring. And it would be very respected by the merchants, by the business man, by the bankers. By it, he signed official documents.

The father was telling the son, you are fully restored to sonship, and you are elevated to every honor as a member of this family.

[ 32 : 40 ] family. It is the same way with us. It is the same way with us. We've all heard this saying, and there's nothing wrong with it, that when we are saved, God treats us as if we had never sinned. That's a great saying. Memorize that. Tell people that. But I want to suggest something to you. It's more than that. It is so very much more than that. When God saves a man or a woman, boy or girl, and it is God who does the saving, He treats us as if we are Jesus. He treats us as if we are His Son. And that goes far beyond anything we can comprehend. We are being treated as if we are the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.