

## The Father's Love

### Introduction:

Happy Father's Day!! I'm glad that you chose to be with us on this day and I trust that God will touch you in some positive way through the service this morning.

As a pastor, finding the appropriate things to say on Father's Day is a difficult task. It's not that there's a lack of material, it's knowing how to say what needs to be said. On Mother's Day the pastor is expected to be sentimental and nice but the Father's Day sermon is supposed to be challenging and convicting. I'm not sure why that is.

But today, I'd like to start by honoring the fathers that are here. I'm so pleased that CCC has been a place where we've had many men who are solid contributors to our congregation. I mention that because it is not often the case. In many churches men are extremely rare. But I would like to say to the men that are here - you are needed, and you are valued. Your presence makes a huge difference in the life of this church. Thank you and God bless you.

As for my message this morning, I decided to speak on the subject of the love of the Father, speaking, of course, of God's love for us. The relevance for us on Father's Day is the simple fact that God is the role model for us as fathers. In fact, the picture that most people have of God is often framed largely by their experience with whatever father figure they may have had.

Some of you may be here this morning who've had a difficult time trusting God in your adult life because you could never rely on your father as you grew up. Some of you have always had a great image of God because your father was a good role model for you. Some of you think that God is a vengeful, angry God because your father was. Others see Him as a God of mercy and love, because that is what you saw. Regardless of what you grew up with, I'm going to ask you to lay aside your preconceived notions of God as Father and see how God reveals Himself to us. For you fathers, see the example God has set for us.

In Luke 15 we find a passage of Scripture which demonstrates clearly the love of God for people and how God sees us. There are three parables in this chapter. In the first,

Jesus relates to the working man; in the second, He relates to women; but in the third, He relates to fathers: this is where we'll spend our time today. Let's read Luke 15:11-31.

*"Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.*

*"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

*"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."*

*"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'*

*"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your*

*property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

*"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"*

## **Background**

There's a lot in this parable, but I would like to begin by putting the proper perspective on the setting in which Jesus is speaking. This is a very difficult time in Jesus' ministry. He had begun to sift the crowds that were following Him by speaking much more clearly on the cost of commitment. In chapter 14 He had declared that anyone following Him must be willing to *"carry his cross and follow (Him)."*

In the opening verses of chapter 15 we find Jesus taking criticism from the Pharisees and the teachers of the law because they couldn't understand why Jesus was willing to hang around with tax collectors and "sinners," people who were considered outcasts among the religious Jews. You see, they were convinced that God hated sinners, and it confounded them that Jesus would spend time with such people. Verse 2 tells us that they "muttered" against Him. Turn to your neighbor and in a conversational tone just tell them "I think the Pastor's finally lost it" three times. There you go - that's probably what the muttering sounded like.

That was the setting that frames these parables. Jesus is speaking to demonstrate how God feels towards the people that upright citizens would look down upon. He reserves, I believe, the most vivid example for last - the father-son relationship.

Who are the cast?

### **1. The Father**

By all indications, the father portrayed here is an upright man. As these parables are representative of the Kingdom of God, we can infer that the father represents God Himself, whom Jesus had asked His disciples to refer to as their heavenly Father. In the Middle-Eastern setting in which this was framed, the father would have been the unquestioned head of his household. What he said was law.

### **2. The Younger Brother**

By all accounts this was a selfish young man. In asking his father for his share of the estate while his father was still alive, he was basically telling his father that he wished he were dead. He wanted what was coming to him and he wanted it now. Not only was he selfish; he was also irresponsible. We can also see that he was immoral. He didn't care how many of his father's rules or of the Ten Commandments that he broke. He was looking out only for himself. He ended up squandering his entire inheritance. This parable does not paint him as a nice guy. He's actually painted quite clearly as a fool.

### **3. The Older Brother**

Much of what we see of the older brother is what we don't read. He didn't cause the father a lot of grief. He received his inheritance from his father when it was given, but he stayed working for his father. He was responsible; he was loyal; he was moral; and he was proud of it.

Now to the story itself.

Shortly after he received his inheritance the younger son begins to feel a wanderlust. Like many young men his desire for adventure and new experiences gets a hold of him. So he gathers all of his possessions together and he leaves, apparently for good. He goes to find the good life. But in his irresponsibility, he believes that his money will last forever. He doesn't invest it. He doesn't buy a home. He spends his money at the casino and at the bar and throws it at beautiful women. Until one day it's all gone. The country he is in experiences a famine, and he learns what it means to be in need.

So the young man takes the only job he can find. This Jewish young man takes a job feeding unclean, unkosher hogs; and he's still not making enough money to feed himself. To Jesus' audience, this young man just committed the unpardonable sin - he turned his back on his family and his God.

But something happened to him. He came to his senses. In his loneliness he remembered a place far, far away where he had felt love, and had enough - a place called home. Although he recognized his sin, he also recognized the fact that his father was a good man and would perhaps allow him to be a hired hand; so he headed for home.

While the young man was away from home it seems that he had assumed that his father

had forgotten about him and gone on with his life. But a good father never forgets a child. The indication we have is that the father continued to look for his son. His eyes would scan the horizon, watching for his return; hoping against hope that one day he would come home.

The father in this parable reminds me of an elderly father I read about from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. He followed D.L. Moody from city to city while he was preaching in the Western United States. In each place he asked permission to say a word to the large crowd gathered to hear the great preacher. He would stand up and in a quavering voice he would say: *“Is my son George in this place? George, are you here? O George, if you are here, come to me. Your old father loves you, George, and can’t die content without seeing you again.”*

The boy no doubt wondered how his father would respond. As he came within eyesight of his father’s house he thought he must be seeing things. He looked off in the distance to see a figure moving towards him wearing what looked like his father’s robes. He didn’t know what to think. But the person wasn’t walking, he was running. It couldn’t be his father - he’d never seen his father run - it wasn’t dignified. For a man of his father’s stature, it would be unheard of. Yet as he got closer, he recognized the flowing beard, the kindly eyes; the warm smile. His father was running to meet him!

Can any of us here imagine the depth of emotion that young man felt as his father gathered him in his arms, held him close and kissed him. The boy was overwhelmed and had to confess - *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”* His father was no fool. He recognized that his son had come home with nothing after having left with a fortune. But what was his response?

He tells his servants to give him a nice set of clean clothes, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Prepare a feast, there’s going to be a party. He said: *“This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”* What a wonderful parable. But Jesus doesn’t end it here. He shifts attention now to the older brother.

The older brother was faithfully working in the field. As he came in for his meal he heard the unmistakable sounds of a party. He called one of the servants to him and he asked what was going on. The servant smiled and said, *“Your brother has come, and your father has called a feast because he has him back safe and sound.”*

I want you to put yourself in the older brother's position. You have faithfully held the fort and worked even harder because your younger brother deserted the family. You've been loyal; you haven't been immoral. You've done everything your father has asked you to do. Why, without your faithfulness the family estate might have been lost. Yet here comes that no good little brother and father is throwing a party, and has actually restored his sonship, including his inheritance. But he'd already gotten his share! What was left was rightfully the elder brother's.

The older brother gets angry - and he refuses to go in. The servant goes in to the father and shares with him what is happening outside. The father goes out and pleads with him - please come in and celebrate with us; be reconciled to your brother. *"But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'"*

*" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"*

### **Conclusion:**

There aren't many here who would judge the older brother too harshly. We can understand where he's coming from. But he's wrong. He's under the mistaken idea that he deserves everything his father has given him - he doesn't. His father worked long and hard for everything that he had and could have done whatever he wanted with it. The responsibility of the older brother was to keep the family together. If he really loved his father, he would have gone after him and brought him home. Jesus went on to model for us what the older brother should have done. He died so we could come home.

The eldest son was trying to come to grips with the scandal of grace. It **was** scandalous that his brother would dare to return home, and it was scandalous that his father, an upright and respected member of his community would receive him with joy. But that is grace. As Bill Hybels writes, *"Grace is an outrageous blessing bestowed freely on a totally undeserving recipient."*