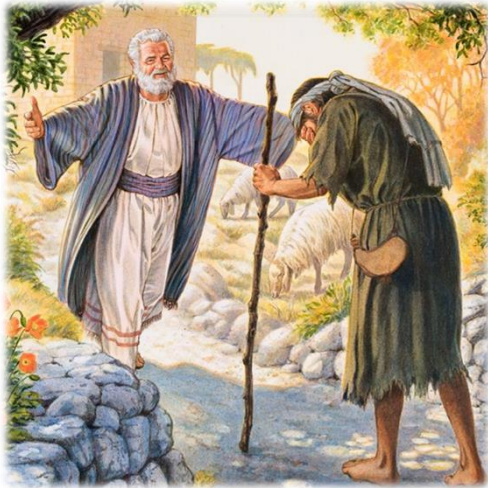


GOD'S HEART: UNDERSTANDING YOUR STANDING (Calven Celliers)



In a follow up to the sermon I preached on Sunday the 16th of July, from the Gospel of Luke 15.

“When people hear the story of the prodigal son, many immediately focus on the son, thinking of him as the ultimate black sheep – the young boy who miserably failed his father ... but Jesus wasn’t just highlighting the plight of son, He was also highlighting the nature of His heavenly Father. Here Jesus gives us a snapshot of God.”
(Greg Laurie)

Just as central to this story is the father who eagerly awaited his son’s return. The word prodigal is defined as “having or giving something on a lavish scale, in a recklessly extravagant way” and I suggested that this

story should rather be known as the Parable of the Prodigal Father.

I have a very real sense of God’s Spirit calling us to turn our attention to, and explore the heart of our loving heavenly Father. I haven’t been able to stop thinking, and marvelling, about this parable since I preached that sermon 3 weeks ago, and this morning I want for us to examine this painting that hangs in the gallery of Luke’s Gospel 15. I love this artistic depiction of Jesus’ story. We can’t see the face of the boy, as he buries his head in his hands. It’s evident, however, that he’s tattered and a far cry from his best. And he returns home defeated with nothing more than brokenness, and he offers a rehearsed apology – **Read Luke 15:21**. The boy cannot imagine after all that he has done, after all the rebellion that has played out in his life, that there is still a place for him in the family, at his father’s table, in his father’s heart, and so he’s willing to give up his birthright, to give up his place, he’s willing to be a hired hand, he’s willing not to be a son. But there’s a twist in the tale. Even though the boy is willing to stop being a son, the father’s not willing to stop being a father!

Look at the face of the father. That’s why I’ve chosen this particular picture. There’s something about the look on the father’s face. I can envision tears of joy glistening on those cheeks, and I’m drawn to the smile that breaks through the silvery hair of his beard. And his arms are open wide. I look at this picture and I see one of the father’s hands holding the boy up so he won’t fall, whilst the other holds him close so he won’t doubt. This is just such a wonderful depiction of lavish, extravagant love and grace!

And the father utters these words – **Read Luke 15: 22 – 24**. There is symbolic significance to what the father offers the boy upon his return. A robe, a ring, and sandals for his feet. These are significant as they represent covering, protection, authority, identity, acceptance, and provision. In that moment the boy’s jaw must have just about hit the floor. He had disrespected his father, squandered his inheritance on ‘wild living – wine, women and song’, turned his back on his father, disgraced the family name. He thought he had forfeited his privilege to sonship. He was stunned at his father’s response, because despite what he had done his father clearly hadn’t given up on him. Forgiveness would be empty without restoration to the privileges forfeited by sin. Please don’t miss the message Jesus wants you to hear this morning. You have made mistakes, you have messed up, you have

wondered from God's perfect will, and I say *have*, with good reason. **Read Romans 3:23.** My sin might look different to yours, you might sin in different ways to me, but sin is sin and we have all fallen short, everyone has sinned. And yet despite this reality, God has never, ever, ever stopped being your Father. He has made a covenant with you. And when you said yes to Him, He said yes to you, and He never breaks a promise.

God's mission is your adoption. When we come to Christ, when we receive salvation, God not only graciously forgives us of our sins, He adopts us. We go from condemned orphans, who have no hope, to being adopted sons and daughters of Almighty God. It's mind blowing to think that as you come before the judgement seat of God one day, smelling like the pigs, stinking of your poor decisions, mistakes, shortcomings, sins and failures. And because of His justice He cannot dismiss your sins, but because of His great love He cannot dismiss you in an act that stunned the heavens – **Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.** God took our sins, our mistakes, our shortcomings, our failures, and put it on His One and Only Son, and Jesus paid the price for you. But the story doesn't end there. As amazing as grace is, as amazing as forgiveness and mercy are, the storyline continues – **Read Romans 8: 15 – 17.** This is revolutionary! God doesn't just cleanse your name, He gives you His name. God doesn't just set you free, He gives you a home.

And what's more, it's intentional, part of His divine plan. I have heard of unplanned pregnancies, but I have *never* heard of an unplanned adoption. God's mission is adoption, why? Because God's motive is love. **Read Ephesians 1: 3 – 7.** God loves you! God chose you to be His very own! When Paul says *'even before the world was made, God loved us and chose us who are in Christ'* he is emphasizing that this choice was based on God's sovereign purpose, not human merit. You and I are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast – **Read Ephesians 2: 8 & 9.**

God's mission is adoption; God's motive is love; God's method is redemption. He purchases us, he pays the price. Redemption is defined as being delivered from sin and its consequences. Redemption is the heart of Christianity, our message is a message of redemption. Let us not become distracted with religion. **Read Galatians 4: 4 – 7.** Note how Paul says we *receive* adoption. We don't earn adoption, we don't have to qualify in order to be adopted.

Can you imagine if a couple went to an adoption agency and said *"You know we're really interested in that little guy, but we just want to clarify a few things first. How much money does he have? Does he come with a bank account, an education fund, and a medical aid?"* Talk about getting the wrong end of the stick. You don't adopt a child because of what a child has. You adopt a child because of what a child needs. God's love for you is not contingent upon what you do or don't do. It does not hinge on how you live. God's love for you and me is unchanging, regardless if we're flourishing or going down in flames. God adopts us, because our deepest spiritual need is a place to belong, a home, a family, a place at the table. God populates the Kingdom through adoption.

"If we cannot earn our adoption by our stellar performance, can we lose it by our poor performance?" (Max Lucado)

Jesus makes it quite clear in Luke 15 that even when we turn our backs on God, even when we rebel (*let's call sin out for what it is. Sin is rebellion against God*), even when we mess up, there's no mess to messy for our heavenly Father. Jesus has paid the price, and God is waiting for you with open arms. There's a place for you at the Father's table this morning – **Read Romans 8: 38 & 39.**

And so, as we come to the Lord's Table this morning, repent. Turn your back on the *distant country* and come *home*. Take up your place as a son, a daughter, of the Living God. God wants you to come to the table this morning with a genuine understanding of your standing. There is nothing that can make God love you any more, and there is nothing you can do to make Him love you any less. He is waiting for you with open arms, feel your Heavenly Father's embrace this morning. **[Communion]**