

## **O SINNER, COME HOME! Luke 15:11-24**

Our Lord Jesus Christ was without a doubt the most controversial Person to ever live on the earth. For the short three and one-half years of His ministry, few who encountered Him remained neutral in their feelings toward Him. The 12 disciples and the multitudes were constantly amazed at what Jesus said and what He did. And their responses were such as these: “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” (Matthew 8:27), and “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?” (Matthew 13:54), and, “If this Man were not from God He could do nothing” (John 9:33). And after witnessing the crucifixion even the hard-hearted centurion declared, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

But all of the responses to Jesus were not positive. The scribes and Pharisees had a totally different view. Their assessments of Jesus were such as these: “This man is not of God, because He does not keep the Sabbath” (John 9:16), and, “He deceives the people” (John 7:12), and then the worst one of them all, which Jesus called blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (Matthew 12:24).

But there was another statement that the Jews threw out about Jesus that they intended for harm that was actually one of the most noble things ever said about our Lord. It is found in Luke 15 verses 1-2. “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” Beloved, there are no greater words of hope spoken in the entire Bible to those who are lost in their sin. “Jesus receives sinners and eats with them”. Isn’t it amazing how at times God will use the mouths of fools to speak profound truth? But Paul echoes the same truth when he writes to young Timothy, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). John the Revelator writes, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ and let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). And our Lord Jesus Christ Himself proclaims, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). The old hymn writer put it this way:

“Sinners Jesus will receive, sound this word of grace to all  
Whom the Heavenly pathway leave, all who linger all who fall.  
Sing it o’re and o’re again, Christ receiveth sinful men

Make the message clear and plain, Christ receiveth sinful men”.

Friends, don't miss this! Jesus Christ did not come primarily to teach you how to live, though He certainly did that. He did not come just to give you an example of how to live, though He certainly did that. He did not come just to relieve your physical or emotional suffering, though He certainly will do that. He did not come primarily to heal your relationship with your husband or wife or with your parents if you are a young person, though He can certainly do that. Jesus came to save you from eternal destruction in hell.

Do you know this truth down deep in the depths of your soul? Have you personally experienced the cleansing of your soul from sin by the risen Son of God and received His peace that passes all understanding, the peace that you are saved and that you will live with Him forever more? If not, the message today is just for you, and I pray that you will know the joy of being received by Christ this very day.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Luke 15. Luke 15 is unique from every other chapter in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And it is unique in that it contains nothing but parables. A parable is a fictitious story that illustrates a spiritual principle. And Luke 15 contains three parables, the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, whom we call the prodigal son. Each parable teaches the precious truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And so along with John chapter 3, Luke 15 is the apex of God's message of love and salvation to a lost and dying world. And the crowning point of the message is the final parable, the parable of the lost son. And I would like to ask you to please stand as we read it together.

Now, there are three things that I want you to notice about this lost son today. We are going to see first that this young man was **sick of home**, and then we are going to see that he went from being **sick of home** to being **homesick**, and finally we are going to see his marvelous **homecoming**. But first of all let's look at this young man when he was sick of home. From our parable it is right to assume that he had a good home life. He had a father that loved him. His father had a number of hired servants, so his dad was a man of some wealth. But a loving, comfortable home did not satisfy this boy. He wanted to get out from under his father's thumb. He wanted to be his own man, living as he pleased. So he went to his dad and said, "Give me the part of my inheritance that is rightfully mine", because he knew that that was his ticket off of the farm.

Now, Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe tells us that as a younger son the prodigal was due 1/3 of his father's estate, and that his request for it before his father's death was legal, but it was far, far from loving. And here's the reason. This boy was his father's son in the flesh, but not a son in the heart, and the only benevolent feelings that he had for his father were generated by his dad's wealth that one day he knew would be his. And his father had to know that his son did not really love him, and it had to break his heart to be rejected by the one he loved so deeply. But amazingly he honored his son's request. He gave his boy his inheritance and allowed him to leave. And when he left Jesus said that he wasted his possessions with riotous living, which means unrestrained living. Whatever indulgence entered his mind to pursue, no matter how ungodly, he went after it.

What a picture of so many people today in their relationship with God! Sons of God in the flesh but not in the heart. According to Luke 3:38 every human being is a son of God in the flesh through Adam. David writes in Psalm 139 that God personally hand-crafted us while we were still in our mother's womb. David also writes in Psalms 145 that the Lord is good to all and that His tender mercies are over all His works (Ps. 145:9). God has been so infinitely good to us to give us life and breath and all that we are and all that we have. He has given us His only begotten Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

But most people who've heard this blessed good news do not love God for all that He's done for them. Most are just like this young man. They seek God strictly for what they can get – health, wealth and happiness, and never think of what they can give to Him, honor and glory and service. They are sick of His authority over their lives. They are just like the citizens in the parable of the 10 minas, who said about their ruler, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). And they are continually on the run to the Far Country, as far away from God and His influence as they possibly can get.

Now, I want to talk to you about the Far Country for just a few minutes. First of all, you need to know that **the allurements of the Far Country are always, always deceptive**. The devil is not stupid. He makes the pleasures of sin a great delight for a season. But the end of the devil's pleasures always turns into heartache and judgment. God says in Gal. 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption..." Almost daily you can pick up the Tuscaloosa News and read of someone who has sown to their flesh and reaped corruption. They've gotten exposed in a sexual sin, or they've been busted for operating a meth lab, or they've been arrested for embezzlement.

And many of these are high profile, highly successful, smart people. And we think, “How could that person be so foolish to think that they could get away with that?” I’ll tell you. Because their smarts could never match the devil’s and they were deceived! He made the pleasures of sin so enticing to them and totally blocked out the consequences. The Far Country is always deceptive.

There is another thing about the Far Country we must realize. And that is, **the Far Country is not as far away as you think**. You don’t have to be far away from the things of God to be in the far country. You could be in the far country this very moment. You are sitting in church but your heart might be a million miles away from God. That was certainly the case with Judas, so close to Jesus for 3½ years yet never saved. And at the final judgment Jesus said that there will be people who say to Him, “Lord, Lord, open for us”, and He will say to them, “I do not know you”. And then they will protest, “But we ate and drank in your presence and heard you teach in our streets”. Friends, these people knew Jesus personally. They shared meals with Him. Some no doubt conversed with Him. They personally listened to the greatest teacher who ever taught. But Jesus says that He will say to them, “Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity” (cf Matt. 13: 25-26).

May I say to you that Hell will be full of people who were around Jesus all of their lives. They were in church on Sunday. They were blessed with Christian parents. They rubbed shoulders with Christians every day at work. But they never repented of their sins and gave Jesus Christ control of their lives. They were so close to the Kingdom of God, with such a great opportunity to enter in, but they continued to believe the devil’s lie that life in the Far Country is so much better than eternal life with Christ. And a lie Satan spins on others is that they are not really in the Far Country. That they are saved because they walked an aisle as a child and got baptized, though there was no real change in their life. Friend, you can’t be saved without a change! God says in 1 John 2:4, “He that says, ‘I know Him’, and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him”. But many will miss Heaven because they are trusting in an insincere childhood decision and their life has never changed.

Others believe they are not in the Far Country because they live a good life. We met many like this last week in Vermont. But those who follow this deception are by no means only on the mission field. I talked to a man just this week who told me that if he were to stand before God today and God asked him why He should let him into heaven, he would say that he lived a good life. The only problem with that is, the Bible says, “There is none who does good, no, not

one” (Rom. 3:12). Friend, Satan will keep you from trusting Jesus with any old lie you’ll swallow.

So we see that the prodigal son was sick of home and left home and went to live in the Far Country. And no doubt the party times were great, but one day the party was over. He ran out of money, and when he did he ran out of friends and he began to suffer. Things got so bad for this little Jewish boy that he had to get a job feeding pigs, and pigs were an abomination to the Jews. And even with a job he was too poor to even buy food to eat, and would have eaten with the pigs if his stomach could have taken it. And all of a sudden this young man changed from being sick of home to being homesick.

Look at v. 17 (“But when he came to himself...”). I want you to picture the prodigal in your mind’s eye. He is perhaps ankle deep in mud, feeding the despised pigs. He stinks just like they do. His stomach is churning with hunger. He has never been more miserable in his life, and more than anything in the world he longed for relief. And then, almost like the apostle Paul on the Damascus road, the light breaks through to his darkened mind. He sees that there is a way out of this horrible nightmare, but only one way. And that is to go back home and throw himself on the mercy of his father and beg for his forgiveness. And when all of this hits him he cries out, “What am I doing here? My father’s servants have more than enough to eat, and I’m starving!”

Sinner friend, may I say to you that this is your first step to salvation. You must come to yourself. You must see yourself in all of your poverty of spirit, in all of your sin, and it must break your heart. And you must see yourself with no hope for deliverance but for one thing, and that is running to Jesus. Running to Him with no demands for blessings, only pleas for mercy. That’s what the prodigal did. When he came to his senses he was crushed by his rebellion and sin against his father. And before he even started back on his journey home he rehearsed what he would say when he saw him: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants”. What a complete about-face in attitude. When he left home his arrogant words were “Give me”, and now in humility he says, “Make me”. Oh, if you’ve never turned from your sins and come to Christ I pray that God will give you a heart to cry out to Him, “Jesus, make me! Come into my life and make me a devoted, passionate follower of You!”

So this poor, homesick boy makes the best decision he ever made in his life and walks out of the pigpen toward his father’s house. Now, let’s put ourselves in his shoes for a moment. He has rejected his loving father, caused

him to have to sell off 1/3 of his property and possessions in order to give him his legal inheritance, and then squandered every bit of it away. He is a homeless, penniless vagrant, the type person, when they walk in a room; people scatter from like fleeing from a skunk. And now he is going back home and asking his father to forgive him, take him back and make him like one of his servants. But what if his father refuses? What if his father calls the authorities? For the law of Moses said that if anyone behaved the way he has behaved he should be stoned (Deut. 21:18-21). But heart pounding, palms sweating, he plods on, praying every step of the way.

Now, beginning in verse 20 we see a precious, precious homecoming. The wayward son is almost home. He rounds the curve and his father's house comes into view. And then notices someone on the porch, too far away to identify. But all of a sudden this person leaps off the porch and starts running down the road toward him, and his heart begins to beat even faster. And as the person gets closer he recognizes him. It is his father!! And by now the boy's blood pressure is way past stroke level. What is father going to say? So he gets ready to begin his plea for forgiveness, but before he can even start his father rushes to him, grabs him and hugs him with all of his might and kisses him. And the Greek indicates he kissed him over and over and over again. He smothered him with kisses.

Well, the prodigal son begins to repent to his father, but before he can even finish the father calls to his servants and says, "Bring the best robe in the house and put it on my son. Bring a ring and put it on his finger, and bring sandals and put them on his feet". And in doing these things right then and there he restored his son to full favor once more. For the robe signified honor and the ring signified authority. That alone was more than the boy ever dreamed to receive and brought comfort to his soul. But best of all were the sandals, for sandals signified sonship, because slaves always were barefooted.

Oh, what a beautiful picture of the love of God! There that boy was, filthy, nasty, stinking, even repulsive in bodily presence, yet smothered with kisses, and clothed in the clothing of a prince. Totally unworthy yet totally accepted. That's what Jesus does for those who come to Him confessing their sins.

It is said that after the Civil War someone asked President Lincoln how he was going to treat all of the citizens of the Confederate states once they returned to the union. He was no doubt expecting Mr. Lincoln to say that they would be censured and demanded to pay some sort of penance. But instead, Lincoln surprised the questioner by saying, "I will treat them as if they've never been

away". Oh, friends, an answer like that came from only one source – God! And that was the answer that the father gave his rebellious son. "Son, I've loved you and prayed for you every day since you left. And this is the greatest day of my life! You are forgiven 1000%". And then he looked again to his servants and said, "Boys, it's party time tonight! Go get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and now he is alive again; he was lost and now he is found".

I want to ask you, how do you stand with the Father today? Are you in the Father's house, because just like the prodigal you became miserable in your sin, and you came to yourself, and you turned from your sin and ran to Jesus and begged for His forgiveness and salvation? Or are you still in the Far County, miserable, lost, and headed for eternal destruction? I tell you that Jesus is standing here, waiting and watching, calling you to come home, calling you to be saved, just like the father of the prodigal son. And the moment that you take a step toward Him He will be running toward you. Won't you come to Him today?