**The Parable of the Loving Father**

Luke 15:11-32

Key V. 20b “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.”

In many artworks Jesus had been painted as a Caucasian man with long hair. But according to a medical artist, Richard Neave using state of the art forensic techniques, Jesus would have been a typical middle Eastern man in the Galilee like a darker complexion and short, dark, curly hair. Isa 53:2 reads, “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” Here my point is that just as Jesus’ physical image could be different from people’s opinions, our invisible heavenly Father could be misunderstood like Pharisees. Through today’s passage Jesus revealed His heavenly Father. Heb 1:3 reads, “Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of God Himself.” Today’s passage is known as the story of the prodigal son. The word “prodigal” means recklessly wasteful. The younger son wasted his inheritance on wild living. But the father was lavish in his love, forgiveness, and acceptance of his son when he returned home. 1Jn. 3:1 reads, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” Jesus, the Son of God, shared His Father’s heart. He left His Father’s house to come to far country of planet earth. He was obedient to the point of death to show God’s lavished love on us. So I chose the title “the Parable of the Loving Father.” There are 2 parts. Part 1. a father & his younger son. Part 2. a father & his older son.

Part 1. Look at v 11-13a. “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.” One day the younger son demanded to receive his inheritance although his father was still alive. He said, “I know you’re gonna drop dead someday, but I don’t want to wait–give it to me now.” The father must have been shocked. He could have said, “I am too young to kick the bucket. Do you know how much I had spent to raise you?” To raise a child born to the age of 18, it will cost a middle-income American couple a quarter of a million dollars, not even including the cost of college. According to Deut. 21(18-21), a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his parents must discipline him. If he still rebels, they should bring him to the elders of his town. He still stubborns, he is to be stoned to death to purge the evil from the Israelites. Wow, that was the way the Pharisees might have expected the father, a typical Middle Eastern man in the story to treat his son when he’s crazy, but amazingly Jesus said, the father simply granted what he wanted. He so loved his son more than money. Soon the son took the money and walked out of his father’s life, heading for the far country. In our culture, grown children routinely leave homes for their freedom. But in Jesus’ time it was great shame to family. The father’s heart must have been broken. He must have shed many tears over him. When our love is rejected like this, we get angry, retaliate, and do what we can do to minimize our affection, so that we won’t hurt so much. But this father maintains his affection and bears the agony and endured. Surely the father in this story represents God. He is our loving Father who will let us walk away from fellowship with Him. He doesn’t force obedience from us. He wants us to freely love and serve Him. He loves us so much that He allows us to make our choices, even though He knows what will happen. As parents we know the kind of pain the Father feels. When they were little we could discipline them, but now we only feel the pain. The greater capacity to love, the greater the capacity to be hurt. God’s love is stronger than any human love. God’s pain is far greater than ours.

Look at v 13b-20a. “and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. **17**When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ **20** So he got up and went to his father.” The wayward son in the far country lived in comfort with lots of money for a while. He must have headed straight for the casinos, the bars, and squandered his wealth in wild living with drugs, alcohol, and all possible pleasure seeking lifestyles. But soon he lost everything. Life had turned upside down. When the music stopped, the friends left. Here we can learn that his own deceptive heart and desire had robbed him of everything, leaving him hopeless and helpless. This is a picture of how sin treats all its victims! It will promise us the lucrative world, but it can only deliver us hopelessness, desolation and death. James 1:14-15 reads, “but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” We say, “It costs us to live for God.” Yes, it does. But it also costs us to live for the devil. It costs more than we can possible imagine. Broken lives, shattered dreams, damaged trust, health issues, hopelessness, depression, and death. There is a saying, “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.” Gal 6:7-8 reads, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction” What was worse, a famine struck him. Now he went out and hired himself out to a citizen of that country. Then he sent him out to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods the pigs were eating. In Jewish society pig is the most disgusting creature. He was greatly humiliated. Then Jesus said he “came to his senses,” realizing that all of his father’s servants got 3 meals a day while he was starving to death. He hit the rock bottom. He said, “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 servants.” He finally remembered his father’s love and his past blessed life. At that critical moment of his life it was the father’s genuine love that prompted him to come back to his senses. Now he humbled himself to go back to his father’s home. However still he was yet to fully understand what his father’s forgiving love was like. Doubt or anxiety might linger in his heart. But thank God! At least he got up and went to his father.

Imagine, if the father was a selfish human father, it might have been written next, “as he came home, his father’s anger flared up and ran at him and kicked him.” No! Look at v 20b. “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.” His heart was broken when his son left. But he never gave up. Every day the father must have wondered where he was and what he was doing. Each day he must have been looking, longing, hoping that one day his son would return. Let’s imagine here. Had the father gone to pigpen, that would have been tragic. The son had to realize his own mistake. God used the pigpen to bring him to that self realization. True fellowship can never be restored until his prodigal son truly repented. Then one afternoon, the father saw something(about the figure that looked) familiar. We don’t know if the son saw his father, but his father saw him. The eyes of mercy are quicker than the eyes of repentance. At a glance, the father realized that it was his son. His eyes were full of compassion. The compassion of God is followed by swift movements. He’s slow to anger, but He’s quick to bless. He didn’t take any time to think about how to respond. He ran to meet his son. In the Jewish culture, the head of a family did not run. He would not pick up his robes and bare his legs, for it would embarrass him. But he didn’t wait for the son to reach him, he ran to meet him. The prodigal must have come at a snail’s pace with heavy heart and downcast eyes with many tears. But his father ran, throwing his arms around him, and kissed him. Greek word shows that he kept on kissing his son even before the son said a word. The son had been working in the pigpen. He smelled awful, not exactly the kind of person you want to hug and kiss! The father could have said, “Oh, you’re back, good. Clean yourself up before you come into my house!” Rather the father accepted him “just as he was.” God the Father, the Creator of the Universe will welcome us the same way, just as we are. The prodigal had many sins to confess, but before he came to the details, his father had forgiven him. It was stronger act of love than any possible words, “Your sins are all gone and will never be mentioned any more. Come, My son, My sweetheart!” He assured him that he was fully/freely forgiven.” It reminds me of a song, “The Savior is waiting.”

“Time after time He has waited before And now He is waiting again To see if you are willing To open the door Oh, how He wants to come in. If you'll take one step Toward the Savior, my friend, You'll find His arms open wide. Receive Him, and all of your darkness will end Within your heart He'll abide.”

When his father welcomed him with open arms, the younger son might have been silent. But as he repented, he said in v21. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” First he said, “I have sinned against heaven.” That’s true. Primarily, all sins were against God, so he had confessed his sins to God. And he confessed to his father, “and I have sinned against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” However the father refused to entertain the idea his son would be a servant. Rather the father continued, showing his grace. Look at v 22-24. “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. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.” Instead of answering his son’s request, immediately the father ordered his servants to bring the best robe. He took a beautiful robe and put it on him, covering all the filth and dirt of his mistakes. That’s a picture of how God covers our sins with a robe of His righteousness. “Put a ring on his finger.” The son probably left with a ring, but sold it long time ago. The father put a new ring on his finger, symbolizing his full status in the family. “Put sandals on his feet.” In those times, slaves didn’t wear shoes, but sons did. Putting sandals on his feet means to restore everything as the son. Then the father ordered his servant to bring the fattened calf and kill it so that they could have a big party. All these things shows that the father never lost his hope for him. The father’s love for his wayward son had never changed. But the son would carry the scars and the regrets of his sinful behaviors. But God’s love covers them all, too.

Through this passage, I learned Heavenly Father’s unconditional love. As some of you knew me, I suffered for the last 2 years, for my youngest son kept running away. Don’t get me wrong. I am not a perfect father. I have problems. I got angry with my sons and I pushed them to study to succeed in the world. I was not able to give them space. So they must have been hurt. My youngest hated to stay at home and explored his own life by running away. I did my best to keep him from going that route. But it was beyond my ability. No matter how hard I tried, he got bad to worse. Sometimes I wanted to say, “Nobody knows my trouble.” But that’s not true. Thankfully God was the suffering Father together with me. Whenever he ran away, God sent good people helping him to come back. Many coworkers prayed for him night and day. Also God didn’t condemn me as much as I deserved. Rather He helped me to know God’s unconditional love to spend everything he has, even sacrificing His One and Only Son Jesus. Likewise I should die to myself & better spend everything I have to love my son. I better respect my son’s decision. I better pray continually and keep my hope like his name, Hope. Whenever God helped him to come back to his senses, I must welcome him with open arms, without condition. Lately Hope is grateful, for we persevered and supported him regardless. This year my key verse comes from Heb. 12:2, “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Honestly it is not easy to be patient, for I am a selfish human father. I thought that my son deserved rough treatments. May the Lord have mercy on this sinner. Help me to become a loving and forgiving father with God’s patience and His never give up hope until he fully restored by God’s grace.

Part 2. the Father and the older son. The story could have ended here. The father had one more problem because of his other son. It is not easy to be a father. But good news is that God’s heart is bigger than all our problems. Look at v 25-27. “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’” Look at v 28-32. “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** 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. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ **31** “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** 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.’” The father didn’t rebuke the older son, saying “Get yourself in that house right now, or you will forfeit your inheritance.” Rather the father went out and tenderly pleaded with him. But the old brother said, “Look.” In Jewish society where respect to elders was important, such word was rude. He said, “All these years I’VE been slaving for you; I never disobeyed you. You never gave ME a goat so I could celebrate with MY friends!” 5 times he used “I”, “Me”, and “My”, exaggerating his own goodness. He compared himself to his brother, calling his brother as this son of yours. Although he never left his home, he had a dysfunctional relationship with his father. He thought that his father owed him. He demanded his father to do things in his own way instead of the way the father wanted. He wanted to get control. He was blind, self righteous, and rebellious. He remained as his own man. “My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.” The elder son was also given his inheritance because the father had divided his estate between them already in V12. Everything was his. Maybe he complaint that his father wasted his portion for his brother again. In reality though, it is only at his expense that his brother can be brought back in. He could have said long time ago, “Father, I’ll look for him and bring him back at my expense.” The younger son’s restoration was free to him, but it came at cost to the elder brother. Here my point is that forgiveness always involves a price. Someone has to pay. In the parable the elder brother was angry, for he didn’t want to pay. But thank God who sent our true Elder Brother, Jesus who paid our debts on the cross in our place. Praise Jesus and His willing sacrifice for us. The father continued, “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.” It means, “It’s our party, you and I have to celebrate. Son come join Me!” In the movie “Amadeus,” Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a talented young composer but he was self indulgent like the younger son. The highly religious and disciplined composer, Antonio Salieri became obsessed with his rival, Mozart. Why? It’s because like the elder son he forgot that Mozart’s talent was lavished by God. Amadeus means “Beloved by God.” Please look at the person sitting next to you. Each of us are beloved by God. Jesus’ story today is not simply about who is right, who’s wrong, or who’s better. Rather everyone is lost. Everyone is loved by God. Everyone is to recognize this humbly and to imitate Jesus to be a part of God’s family. Jesus left it open-ended on purpose, making a graceful plea for religious leaders to change their hearts. It also helps us to think about where we fit in the story.

In conclusion through the parable of our loving Father we’ve seen a wonderful picture of who God is. I want to call our God as a prodigal Father, for he has spent everything he has lavishly for His children. Praise Jesus who sacrificed on the cross for sinners like us as our true Elder Brother. May the Lord help us to grow in Jesus’ image and participate in His joyful party for the lost. One word: God’s lavish love