

Lost People Matter To Jesus – Part 4

Luke 15:11-24

- Tell the story about the grandson who is painstakingly drawing a picture. When asked by his grandmother what he is drawing he says he is drawing a picture of God. When his grandmother says, "Honey no one knows what God looks like," he responds by saying, "They will when I get done."
- As we examine this text we will see that Jesus draws a picture with His words of God, the heavenly Father. This word picture does not give us a complete picture of God the Father, but it pictures God's attitude, God's heart for the repentant sinner.
- No one could give us a better picture of the heavenly Father and his heart than Jesus. So for the next few minutes let's take a close look at this portrait and see three great lessons about God, the heavenly Father.
- *First we learn from this portrait that...*

I. GOD IS A WILLING FATHER. (20) Verse 20 says that the younger son "...arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father SAW him..."

Those last four words are significant..."his father saw him." What does that tell us about the father in this story? It tells us that this father was looking for the younger son to come home. He was longing for the younger son to come home. The father, don't miss this, wanted the younger son to come home. He was willing for the younger son to come home.

And so it is with God, the heavenly Father. Listen to what 2 Peter 3:9 says about God. Listen carefully to this verse. This is such an important verse. We need to let it pierce our hearts today.

2 Peter 3:9 says, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

Do you believe what that verse says about God? I am not asking if you believe that it is in the Bible. I am asking if you believe that God truly genuinely wants to save your sons and your daughters, your loved ones, your friends.

If you say you believe that then let me put your claim to the test. Who have you gotten down on your knees and prayed for and wept over this week? Who have you witnessed to this week? Who did you invite to come with you to church this week or to Friends and Family Sunday?

If you can't answer those questions with at list a short list of names....then don't tell me you believe that God is willing and wanting to save. For if you believed that, really believed that, you would have people on your heart.

And by the way, it is true whether you really believe it or not. God is still in the life changing, behavior transforming, soul saving business! He is willing and wanting to save. GOD IS A WILLING FATHER.

Then secondly note that this picture Jesus provides us of God teaches us that...

II. GOD IS A LOVING FATHER. (20-24)

We sang a hymn earlier that said, *"How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure..."* That word "vast" is a beautiful depiction of God's love because when something is vast that means that it is huge, enormous, gigantic, or limitless.

We see the vastness of the father's love illustrated vividly in this story. Verse 20 says that when the father saw the younger son coming he "had compassion." Compassion is love that takes action. And I want you to notice the two ways in which the father shows his love to the younger son.

The same two ways that God expresses His love to us. One of the ways....

1. The Father expresses His love through MERCY. Mercy is one side of God's love. Mercy is not getting what is deserved.

For example notice, that when he sees his son headed for home, he doesn't go and hide, denying his son access. Nor when he speaks to the son does he say... "I knew it, I knew you'd blow it, every dime. And I suppose your back wanting more!" He didn't slap his son across the face or dispatch armed servants to keep the boy off the property. The son probably deserved such treatment, but mercy kept the younger son from getting what he deserved.

2. The Father also expresses His love through GRACE. Grace is the second side of God's love. Grace is getting what we don't deserve.

Verses 20-24 is one of the great grace encounters in the Bible.

Throwing all dignity aside, the father runs to meet his son, embracing him and kissing him. And as the son tries to vocalize his confession, the father begins ordering up the best robe for him wear, a ring for his hand, shoes for his feet, and a beef barbeque was immediately scheduled.

All of those gifts of grace represent three spiritual realities.

1) Because of grace sinners can be FORGIVEN. Forgiveness was needed because of the rebellion of the younger son. He had incurred a debt and for forgiveness to take place... the Father absorbs the debt.

2) Because of grace sinners can be RECONCILED.

3) Because of grace sinners can have NEW LIFE

I hope you get the message here. Grace triumphs over sin at its worst.

What picture we have... GOD IS A WILLING FATHER, GOD IS A LOVING FATHER, and finally Jesus shows us that...

III. GOD IS A GREAT FATHER. (24) *"They began to be merry."*

A celebration begins and no doubt everyone in their community is invited to join in. The Father wants everyone to rejoice with him.

This of course is an illustration of what is going on in heaven, an unending party, an endless celebration as moment after moment sinners are saved and souls are birthed into the kingdom.

But let's be clear about something. The reason there is a celebration is not the sinner who repents, but the reason for the celebration is a Father who saves. The celebration really is a testimony to the greatness of the Father, a father who exhibited mercy and grace, and who gave forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life.

The film *Finding Nemo* is an animated story of a father's resolute search for his son. The father, a fish named Marlin, teams up with another fish named Dory to find Nemo. A dentist captured Nemo while diving off the coast of Sydney, Australia and placed him in a fish tank in his office. Nemo thinks his father has forgotten about him and that he'll never see him again. But one day a pelican named Nigel lands in the window of the dentist office and begins to tell Nemo an amazing story. "Nemo! Your father's been fighting the entire ocean looking for you!" reports Nigel.

"My father?" Nemo responds.

"Oh, yeah! He's been battling sharks and jellyfish," Nigel recounts.

"It's my dad! He took on a shark!" proudly exclaims Nemo.

Nigel says, "I heard he took on three."

Nemo is dumbfounded. He repeats, "Three?"

Nigel explains, "You see, kid. After you were taken, your dad started swimming like a maniac. He took on three sharks. He battled an entire jellyfish forest. Now he's riding a bunch of sea turtles on the east Australian current, and the word is he's headed this way right now to Sydney."

"What a great dad!" Nemo says.

That is exactly the conclusion Jesus wants us to come to today... what a great father.

There is a celebration going on in glory... what are we doing to contribute to it?