

Baptismal Service

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you, Peter. And thank you, Christy and Michael, for sharing with us. It's just so great to hear about how God is working in people's lives, and what he's doing, and how he is not a dead God, but he is a living God.

And great as well to hear Starkey's current relationship status as well. Fantastic. Why don't we turn back to this passage, folks? It's a brilliant chapter in the Bible, Luke chapter 15.

And we're going to spend just a few minutes now looking at this together. So why don't you turn there, if you've got it in front of you. And let me pray as we come to look at this passage together. Let's pray.

Father God, we thank you so much for this special morning, and the joy of hearing stories about how you are living, and how you continue to transform lives up and down the face of this planet.

And so, Lord God, we ask that you continue to do that now as we look at your words, the Bible. Would you give us ears to listen? Would you give us eyes to see?

[1 : 0 5] Would you give us minds to grasp who you really are? So this is our prayer made in Jesus' name. Amen. So just as we come to this passage this morning, I want to tell you a story about a man I was reading about this week.

And this man, in 1962, goes with his guitar and his three friends to a recording studio. And he performs in front of a producer, one of the first ever music editions that he's played in his life.

And once he and his friends had finished playing in front of this producer, they asked the record producer what he thought of them. And he replied, We don't like your boy's sound.

Groups are out. Four-piece groups, especially with guitars, are finished. Turn to your neighbor for ten seconds. Who do you think was the man and who was the group? Go for it.

Go for it. Okay, that'll do.

[2 : 1 5] Give me a couple of shouts. Who do we think? Who was that? Who's the man? The Beatles. It was Paul McCartney, and it was the Beatles performing one of their first ever editions. That guy's kicking himself.

He missed out on the Beatles. So my question this morning to you as we come to this passage is, has there ever been a time in your life where you've got someone completely wrong?

And as we come to this passage this morning, are you in life at the minute misunderstanding who God is? Let's put it in the language of this passage here. Have you got right the Father this morning?

You see, Jesus tells this story in Luke 5. He tells this parable, which is really an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. That's what a parable is. And he doesn't just fling it out there in public. He tells this story to a watching and a listening crowd.

And if you've got your Bibles there, you'll see who's in this crowd at verse 1 of chapter 15. There are two groups of people in this crowd. On the one hand, we've got tax collectors and sinners.

[3 : 24] We have the despised and the most hated of society. They're listening to this story. And on the other hand, we have the Pharisees and the scribes. We've got the religious elite and the top of society.

And what is happening as Jesus tells this story? What are the bad doing? They are drawing near to Jesus. They're drawing and they're coming near to Jesus.

And these squeaky clean people over here are looking at these people, drawing near to Jesus. And they're saying, Jesus, why on earth are you interested in these people? Why are you hanging out with these people?

He can't seriously, he cannot seriously, John McEnroe style. He cannot seriously be telling me that God is concerned with these types of people. Well, you see, we need to know what Jesus knows about this crowd.

That there's people in this crowd who have got God completely wrong. Question to you, have you got God wrong this morning?

[4 : 31] You see, this parable that Jesus tells to this crowd, it centers on a family home. And it centers particularly around a father. Okay, he's the main character in this story.

And the big question of the parable is, what is the father like? What is he like? What is his heart? What is he about?

What is he in the business of? What is he doing? This father, he's got two sons. And we meet the two sons in this parable. And the question is, what do the sons, the two sons, understand about their father?

Well, you see, at verse 12, we get son number one, the younger of the sons. Now, what is he like? Well, he loves the high life.

He loves the expensive suits. He loves the clothes. He loves the parties. He loves the razzle dazzle. But what do you lack? He lacks two things. He lacks, firstly, the money to make that happen.

[5 : 33] And secondly, he lacks the freedom to make that happen. So what does he do? He goes to the father, his father, and he says, father, do you notice what he says?

He doesn't ask him, have you got any spare change? He doesn't ask him for a tenner. What he says to his dad is, dad, I'd be so grateful. I'd be so grateful. If effectively, you could play dead. I'd love it if you could die, because if you're dead, and we act like you're dead, I can get the inheritance money that is coming to me.

And I'll be honest with you, I don't want to wait for that inheritance money. I want it now. In other words, dad, I'm not interested in you. Not interested in you, but I'm very interested in the stuff I can get from you.

Who does this son, number one, understand his father to be? His father is nothing but an inconvenience. His father is nothing but a killjoy. He's a means to an end.

How he understands and views the world is that true joy is to be found away from the father and true satisfaction is to be found in living a life of pleasure and party that can only be found in running as far away from his father as is possible.

[6 : 48] Is that how you see the father this morning? You know, C.S. Lewis, in his book, Surprised by Joy, he talks about his conversion to Christianity and he talks about what his thinking of God was before his conversion to Christianity and he writes that Christianity had at its center a giant interferer.

Do you see what he's saying? That God just, he just got in the way of stuff. He was prohibiting me from doing things. Is that how you understand the father this morning? You see, son number one, he's got his father all wrong.

But his father, he gives him what he's asking for. The father, what does he do in this passage? He divides his property. Now the Greek word there tells us that it's more than he just writes a check and has it to his son.

The father here is literally said to divide himself over this request from his son. Do you see what he's saying? Jesus is telling the story and telling us that this father is heartbroken over this request from his son.

And the son, well, he takes his father's money and he beats it out of there as fast as he can and he goes on the gap yards of all gap yards. Doesn't he? He parties.

[8 : 11] Every round at the bar is on him. Every photo he posts on Facebook, he's surrounded by friends. This guy's living the life. But what happens?

Well, the money runs out and those newfound friends that he thought he had, they were nowhere to be seen. And exactly how he treated the father, that he was interested in his stuff, not him, that's exactly how these newfound friends have treated him.

They want his stuff, not him. And to survive, what does he have to do? Well, he's a Jewish boy and in this passage he makes himself a slave to a Gentile and a Gentile pig farmer.

I mean, this is the ultimate humiliation for this son, number one. Verse 17, he comes to his senses and he decides that he is better off at home.

So you can picture it in your head. He's making the long journey home with the cap well and truly in his hand. And he's no doubt thinking to himself in his mind as he returns home a failure, he understands, not a success.

[9 : 19] He returns home no career, no Ferrari, just ripped clothes, an empty stomach and a catalogue of regrets and mistakes. So when he gets home and his father sees that he's blown it big time, all this money that the father gave him to start with is just gone, how is the father going to react?

Do you see how he rehearses this speech in his head? You ever done that with your dad? You should do it plenty of times before I gave him my report card. Rehearsed the speech in my head again and again.

How is the father going to react to this running rebel of a son? We know what son number one deserves. The listeners of this parable know what son number one deserves.

Hey, even son number one knows what son number one deserves. The question is, how will the father react to this running rebel? Well, verse 20.

The camera pans from looking at son number one to looking at the father. And I just want us to see two words this morning that Jesus uses to describe the father. How does this father feel towards his son?

[10 : 32] Verse 20. Compassion. What is the father doing here? The father is looking. The father is longing. The father is loving.

And when he sees his son in the distance, he runs to meet him and greets him. Not with a handshake. Not with a fist pump. Not with a nod of appreciation. He meets him with a loving embrace.

He runs to his son to greet him and he kisses him and he throws his arms around him. Now, we have to say that is very strange behavior. not just for a male but for a Jewish male in this time.

Do you see how the father makes himself undignified because of how much he loves his son? My son who is lost is now found. Now, what does that lead to?

Second word for us to see at verse 23. The father celebrates. Celebrates. The father is joyous.

[11 : 33] The father is lavish. The father sings and he dances for the son of his who was dead is now alive. Who is this father?

He is the longing looker. He is the loving seeker. He is the one who celebrates when lost people are found. He is the one who rejoices when dead people are declared alive.

What is the message to the crowd that are hearing the story from Jesus? That this is how God feels when lost men and women turn and repent of their sins and run towards God for forgiveness and mercy.

This is how God feels. All people, no matter how bad you think they are, all people, no matter how good you think they are, the father is looking for these lost people to come to their senses and see that they are lost and to run to him for forgiveness and mercy, to come to him and receive life and joy.

This is what the father's like. He's full of compassion and grace. Have you got the father wrong this morning? How do you understand him?

[12 : 53] Are you like son number one? Do you believe the lie that a complete and a joyful life is found in living life away from him, not with him? The question to this crowd and to us this morning is how will the younger brothers in the crowd react as they see themselves in this character and as they see the character of who the father is?

There's son number one. There's another son in the story. What about him? What's he doing? Well, he's in the field. He's at home and verse 25 he hears the commotion that's going on inside and he finds out that lo and behold son number one is back.

The arrogant traveler he's returned. But here is the square that he can't quite circle in his mind. If my brother has returned a failure then why are we celebrating like he's returned a success?

You see the older brother wants a seat at the front row of his brother's public humiliation party not at the front row of his public celebration welcome home party.

and the father the father hears of this and he goes to number two son and he pleads with him saying son listen your brother has returned you should be inside celebrating with me and with us.

[14 : 23] Don't stare here in the cold come on in and celebrate. not a chance says the older brother not a chance are you kidding me after what he did that he's going to swan in here and we're going to pretend like nothing's happened is that what's going on here?

Who does son number two understand his father to be? Well look how he describes how he understands that relationship at verse 29 all these years father what does he say I have what?

I have slaved for you all these years I have what does he say I have obeyed your orders who does son number two understand the father to be?

Someone to be tolerated and someone with whom you keep up appearances with certainly not somebody to be enjoyed because I tolerate you father because I perform for you father because I obey you father that means father that I deserve to be treated better than those who don't tolerate and perform and obey you you see son number one well he had the father way wrong son number two equally got the father way wrong what's son number two's problem?

Well he's got a hard heart he may well be right up close to the father proximity wise but his heart is a million miles away from understanding who he truly is I wonder if that's some of us this morning you know your relationship with the father if you had to describe it it would be much better described along the lines of slave language than it would of son language you know we might have been going to church all these years we might have been attending the Christian union at university all these years we might have been blessed to live and grow up in a Christian family and still live there all these years but the truth of it is that we do not have a clue who the father really is and our relationship to him well it's based on our merit before him rather than on his mercy to us and how does that show itself how does that manifest itself well it shows itself in a hard heart that looks down on people and categorizes them as not worthy or worthy that's certainly a proportion of this crowd that Jesus is talking to and I wonder if it's a proportion of us this morning let me ask you again if you got the father wrong this morning it's interesting isn't it that as we come to the end of this story that we're not told how some number two responds

[17 : 05] I mean this is a deliberate cliffhanger from the master storyteller of all storytellers Jesus Christ so how will the older brothers in the crowd and how will the older brothers here this morning respond as they see themselves in his character and as they see the character of the father displayed in front of him he got God wrong this morning well as we close see that there's a third son in this parable you say where's the third son in this parable well he's there we remember that the guy who's telling this story Jesus Christ is himself a son not an imaginary one but a real son and if we take a step back from the story we need to consider that he himself is a son he's God's own son God's own son who left his father's heavenly house and who left it to go and search out those who are lost he left it to go and seek out and to save those who are running because where does this story come in the context the bigger picture of Luke's gospel we're chapter 15 here well Jesus tells this story on his way to

Jerusalem the place where he goes to offer his life willfully and obediently to his father the place where he goes to take the sin of running rebels like you and like me on himself you see God the father hasn't just swept sin under the carpet he doesn't just pretend and close his eyes like it's not there he's dealt with it you see the father's grace to running rebels like us it's free but don't misunderstand that it's cheap this is what son number three has come to do through costly grace and great humiliation provide a way for running rebels like us to come and be made whole with God to come and be reconciled to God the father that's what he's come to do that's the business he's employed in just as much as just as much today as it was true then you see in that sense Jesus is not just the one son who gets the father absolutely right but he is the one who perfectly shows us what the father is like and to be honest I think in this parable he probably is the father that's the consistent theme we've heard in the testimonies this morning isn't it that Jesus is the great seeker and finder of the lost that Jesus sought me out and he saved me when I wasn't looking for him in fact when I was running from him he came looking for me and rescued me back

I don't deserve to be called a son or daughter but he makes me into one and he has made a way for me to come and be welcomed into the father's house so the call this morning is for younger brothers and for older brothers to get the father right and to be made right with the father to come and through Jesus Christ enter the grand and great grace celebration of prodigals welcomed home let me pray and then let's get dunking oh our father we thank you we thank you thank you that we read in your word the bible that you are in the business of showing outrageous grace to running rebels and lord our prayer is that you would help us to know you rightly this week and we pray these things in

Jesus name amen