Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus' View of the Father
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1272

Jesus's View of the Father

You know, we live in such a fast paced world that we've forgotten how to stop and contemplate God. We don't like to think about meditation, that's kind of a bad word because it conjures up a whole religious system that we reject. But meditation is a biblical word. And sometimes we don't even like the word "worship" because worship sounds something like an austere ritualistic legalism from which we were redeemed and we're not too anxious to fall back into that. And we are such a pragmatic society that we tend to think of God only in terms of what He can do for us. We tend to think of Jesus only in His humanness and not so much in His deity. We tend to think as the world would make us think, I suppose, that God is sort of a Santa Claus figure, a grandfather figure, the all-time nice guy. Or on the other hand, some people in the world think God is nothing more than a cosmic kill-joy. If you read your insurance policy you'll find under the category "act of God", earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc.

Do we really know who God is? If we were to sum up all that He is what would the sum be? In Mark 11:22 Jesus said, "Have faith in God." I thought about that this week. Jesus said have faith in God. Jesus said you can trust God. You can put your life in His hands. And for Jesus to say that is something very special because Jesus knew God better than anybody. And if Jesus said God can be trusted with your life, it's pretty good recommendation.

Jesus knew God better than anybody. Better than the theologians who have spared no ink in writing about Him through the centuries. Better than the erudite philosophers and thinkers who have voluminous efforts of thought regarding deity. Better than the prophets who received their information by revelation. Better than the Apostles who the same received it by revelation. Better than any human source whose mind is limited by the confines of humanness. Jesus knew God better than anybody. And Jesus said you can trust God.

You see, Jesus had spent all of eternity past in the presence of God. There never was a beginning of God and there never was a beginning of Jesus. And so always they had been together and in John 1 it says they were pros ton theon, Jesus was face to face with God. In fact, in His high priestly prayer in John 17 He said, "Father, give Me back the glory I had with You before the world began." If anybody knows about God, He does. And He says you can trust God with your life.

And so, I began to think about that. If I really want to know what God is like, then I ought to listen to what Jesus said. And what does Jesus say about God?

First of all, He gives us a great presentation of God, a great presentation of God in His words in the gospels. In John 4:24 He tells us about the nature of God. He says God is a spirit. In John 17:11 He tells us about the holiness of God, He says, "Holy Father." And in John 17:25 He says, "O righteous Father."

And then Jesus repeatedly tells us about the justice of God. In Matthew 21:33 and following He tells about a vineyard owner who literally destroyed the wicked husbandman who had ill treated his servants and his son and that vineyard owner is God. And He judges sin. In Matthew 22 He tells about a man who refused to wear the wedding garment and was cast into outer darkness. In Matthew 25 He tells us about five foolish virgins who came too late and were left out. In Matthew 25 at the end of the chapter He even tells us as He dies on the cross that He is dying, in effect, under the devastation of divine judgment.

And so Jesus tells us about the justice of God, about the holiness of God, about the nature of God. In Mark 10:27 He says, "With God all things are possible." And so He tells us about the power of God. In Matthew 23:22 He talks about heaven being the place of the throne of God and thus He teaches us regarding the sovereignty of God. In Mark chapter 6 and verse 4 He says, "The Father who sees in secret," and thus He tells us of the omniscience of God. And in Matthew 6:32 He says, "Your Father knows you have need." And He goes on to tell how if He clothes the grass of the field, He'll clothe you too and thus He tells us about the care of God. In Matthew 5:45 He says He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust and thus He defines the providence of God. If you want to know about God, listen to Jesus. He's known Him forever.

Jesus taught us the major truths about God then, His nature, His holiness, His justice, His power, His sovereignty, His omniscience, His care and His providence. But you know something? In all of that and there's more even to that, we still haven't touched on the main lesson Jesus taught us about God. There is one lesson that supercedes every other lesson He ever gave. There is one title for God that is repeated in the gospels 189 times, 124 of those times in the gospel of John alone. And that title for God is simply this, say it with me, "Father...Father." More than anything else, more than any other concept of God, more than any other theme about God, Jesus majored on the fact that He was a father. "Father" was always Jesus' special way of referring to God. He says, "My Father, our Father, your Father and just plain Father."

In fact, do you remember something? The first words Jesus ever utters in the chronology of His life occur in the place of the temple. His parents have begun their journey home, He's only twelve. They notice in the entourage that He isn't there. They go back and they say, "What are You doing here,

Son?" In effect. Do you remember what He said? "Don't you know I must be about...what?...My Father's business." Father was ever and always the theme of Jesus' teaching about God. And I believe, people, in that wonderful passage in Luke 2 that you have in the primary confession of Jesus the germ of all His teaching about God. God more than anything else is My Father.

Dr. H.R. McIntosh(?) said in his book, The Doctrine of the Person of Christ, quote: "The recurrence of the sweet and deep name `Father' unveils the secret of His being." Jesus taught us that our prayer is to begin...what?..."Our Father." So did His prayer begin in John 17.

What did Jesus teach us about the fatherhood of God? Let's go to John chapter 5 verses 17 to 24 and find out. This is the theology of Jesus regarding the fatherhood of God. Concentrate with me on this. Verse 17, "Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hither to and I work." Stop right there.

You want to know what's going on? Jesus just healed a man, something that He should have been commended for, frankly. But because He had done it on the sabbath He was indicted as one who broke the rabbinical tradition, one who broke the law. And because He did this healing on the sabbath He had provoked a Jewish reaction and they literally were manifesting hatred and persecuting Him and even plotting His murder. And now Jesus gives them a speech which is meant to justify His healing on the sabbath. But inherent in that speech where He justifies His healing on the sabbath is a tremendous statement about God that's introduced in verse 17. And I believe He gives here five great qualities of the Father that become, in my mind, the standard for fatherhood. Listen. God did not get His title of "Father" from a human analogy. Man gets his definition of father from God. It's a big difference. God is THE Father. And we see five qualities of His fatherhood as the Lord talks about Him.

Number one, the Father is one with His Son...the Father is one with His Son. Look at it in verse 17. "My Father works hitherto and I work." Now what's He saying? He's saying God works on the sabbath and I work on the sabbath. I am one with God so like God I work even on the sabbath. Now this, believe me, people, is an astounding statement in Jewish ears. Listen, in Mark 2:27 Jesus said, "The sabbath was made for man."

You say, "Well now wait a minute. When God created six days He rested on the seventh." No, He only rested from His creation. If He had rested everything He made would have fallen apart. He ended the work of creation, He began the work of sustaining all that He had made. God doesn't need any rest. I just want to encourage you about that. In Isaiah 40:28 it says, "The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth faints not, neither is weary." God doesn't have to rest. The rest that He spoke of from creation was to set a pattern for man who needs a day of rest, who needs a day to focus on worshiping Him. But sabbath was made for man. And so God isn't bound by it. And if God wants to heal on the sabbath, He'll heal and Jesus, in effect says, and so will I. And saying that He is making Himself...what?...equal with God. And that's exactly the message they got, verse

18, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him because He not only had broken the sabbath but said that God was His Father, making Himself...what?...equal with God."

You want to know something, beloved? It's hard to understand this but He was equal with God, He was God. One thing true about the Father, He is one with His Son...He is one with His Son.

Jesus further emphasizes this in verse 19, "Then said Jesus unto them, Verily, verily I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do, for whatever things He doeth, these also doeth the Son in the same manner." He says we're one, we work together, we do things together. The point is this close and intimate communion between the Father and the Son, I think that it's aptly illustrated in the great prayer of our Lord in John 17 and verse 1, "These words spoke Jesus, lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son that Thy Son also may glorify Thee. I have glorified Thee on earth, I have finished the work Thou hast given Me to do and now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." In verse 21 He prays that they all may be one as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee that they may be one in us. In other words, over and again Jesus knew that being a Son of God meant that He was one with the Father.

There's a second thing here about the Father from Jesus' perspective. Not only is the Father one with the Son but secondly, the Father loves His Son. Look at it in verse 20, couldn't be simpler. "For the Father loves the Son." Stop right there.

Jesus knew the Father loved Him. It's a unity of love. And back again to the seventeenth chapter where Jesus prays, again in these words expressing this tremendous love, He says, "I in them and Thou in Me that they may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me." He knew the Father loved Him. Verse 26, "I have declared unto them Thine name and will declare it that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them."

Listen, you want to know what Jesus thought about God? He said God is a Father. What does it mean that He's a Father, Jesus? It means He's one with His Son. What else does it mean? It means that He loves His Son. As for God Himself, how many times did He say, "This is My...what?...beloved Son"? The first and foremost object of the Father's love is the Son.

There's a third thought here. The Father blesses the Son. Look at verse 20 again. "And showeth Him all things that He Himself doeth and He will show Him greater works than these." The Father spares nothing for the Son. Shows Him everything that He knows, everything that He has, everything that the Son could ever do. And beyond what the Son had even seen in His human experience, God would allow Him to see and do. He spared nothing...nothing. The Father blesses the Son.

I suppose it's...that's why Jesus was full of grace and truth because God gave Him not the spirit by what? By measure. He showed the Son everything, spared nothing. Even the cross had its joys. The Bible says He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

So the Father is one with His Son, the Father loves His Son, the Father blesses His Son. There's a fourth thought. The Father gives authority to His Son...the Father gives authority to His Son. Verse 21, look at this, "For as the Father raiseth up the dead and given them life, even so the Son giveth life to whom He will. For the Father judgeth no man but hath committed all judgment unto the Son."

Listen, do you know what He's saying? He is saying equal authority is given to the Son. He will give life. He will bring to pass the judgment. And I believe what He is saying there in verse 21 is both a physical and a spiritual resurrection power. I believe it is the Son who with the Father gives life spiritually. I believe it is the Son with the Father in the end who will give life to physical bodies as they come to the resurrection. And so, we see that He is equal in power. He is equal in authority. He is equal in His right to rule and reign and judge.

Verse 25 further expresses this. "The hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live, for as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself and hath given Him authority to execute judgment," and so forth. And so the Father has given authority to the Son...now watch this...to act in the Father's behalf...to act in the Father's behalf. Tremendous thought.

Now listen. The Father is one with His Son. The Father loves His Son. The Father blesses His Son. The Father gives power and authority to His Son. Finally, Jesus says of the Father, and I love this, He honors the Son...He honors the Son. Verse 23, and He calls all the world to that honor, "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father who hath sent Him." And by the way, verse 24 brings the sum of it, "He that hears My word and believes on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life." If you listen to this command to honor the Son, if you kiss the Son, if you embrace the Son, you will be raised to everlasting life. If you do not, you will come into judgment. And so, the Father honors the Son.

Now let me sum it up. God is a Father from Jesus' perspective who is one with His Son, who loves His Son, blesses His Son, empowers His Son and honors His Son. I believe, people, that that is probably the most concise theological statement Jesus ever made about the Father. It sums it up so beautifully. How did He see the Father? In those five ways.

You say, "Well, that's nice for Him, but after all, we're not deity. I mean, what does that have to do with us? We're not sinless perfection, we're sinful imperfection. We're men, not God. Jesus was God. Jesus even said in John 14, if you have seen Me you have seen the Father. I mean, how does

this apply to us? Is God such a Father to me as He is to Christ? Is God such a Father that He would make me one, that He would love me and bless me and give me power and authority and honor? Is God such a Father to me?"

Listen. Hebrews chapter 2, look at it, Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 11. This is just a tremendous statement, listen. "For both He that sanctifieth," now who is the only person in the universe who can sanctify? God. "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of...what?...one. For which cause He...that is Christ, the Lord...is not ashamed to call them...what?...brethren." Is that great? Is God such a Father to me that He is to Christ? Yes. Verse 12 says it, "Saying I will declare Thy name unto My brothers; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee." Listen to this, people. Jesus sees Himself here in this magnificent prophecy of Psalm 22 standing in the assembly of the redeemed and standing with arm in arm the brothers who belong to the family and together raising praise to God. Jesus sees Himself as one of us and calls us brothers. Is God such a Father to us as He is to Christ? Jesus called us brothers. He called us brothers.

In Romans chapter 8 there is yet another word. In verse 14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and...what?...joint heirs with Christ." Co-heirs with Christ. Is God such a Father to us as He is to Christ? Yes. That's exactly what Paul is saying. That's exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying.

Peter said it this way, listen to his words: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue by which are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises...now listen...that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." Listen, when you became a Christian you became a partaker of the divine nature. When you believe in Christ you became in Christ. When you were saved you became one with the Lord Jesus. His life is imputed to you, nevertheless you live, yet not you but...what?...Christ lives in you. God sees you as one with His Son, as one with Himself, as the equal recipient of all that is fatherhood and its benediction may mean. When Jesus talks about Father, He isn't just talking for Himself, He's talking for you and for me.

Now, I want to close with an illustration that Jesus gave. I believe without a doubt this is the single greatest statement that ever came from His mouth on the character of God and it's in Luke 15...Luke 15. Commonly the story is titled "The prodigal son," frankly, that's not the right title, this is not the story of a prodigal son, this is the story of a loving father. This is not a story of a sinful boy, this is the greatest single statement on the fatherhood of God and its character ever made by our Lord. The average newspaper article is 600 words, in only 400 words a concise and literary masterpiece out of the mouth of Jesus He sums up the fatherhood of God in a non-theological and practical way that literally makes alive everything the New Testament says about God.

Let me read it to you. Verse 11,

And He said, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after that the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land and he began to be in want and he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, but no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself he said, How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger? I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.

And he arose and came to his father. And when he was yet a great way off his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry for this my son was dead and is alive again, he is lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house he heard music and dancing and he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come and thy father has killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry and wouldn't go in.

Therefore came his father out and entreated him and he answering said to his father, Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine. It was fitting that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is alive again and was lost and is found.

What a great story. Listen, people, that is not the story of a lost son, that is the story of a loving father. And listen to me. A loving father who loved two sons, under two different conditions with the same love, the very same love. Look at the story again. Verse 11, "A certain man had two sons, the younger of them said to his father, Give me the portion of the goods that falleth to me." Now listen, the younger son had a right to part of the inheritance. The older son got two thirds and if there were

only two that would mean a third of the inheritance was his. But it was always of case that he waited till his father died and then received a third of the estate. But he wants it and he wants it now which means the father in responding to his request would have to literally liquidate his estate and convert it into enough cash to give this son what he asked for. And the son got what he asked for. At the end of verse 12, "He divided unto them his living." His liquidated everything he had and put it in the care of his sons. He bestowed upon them all that he possessed.

Verse 13, "Not many days after that the younger son gathered all together, took his journey into a far country and wasted his substance with asotos, dissipation." The word literally means wastefulness, excess, wild extravagance, squandering it. It doesn't tell us what he did. His dirty-minded brother assumed that he wasted it on the harlots, but he didn't have that information. That was just a slanderous statement. We don't know what he did with it, but he ruined himself by wasting it all. And then he faced a double disaster. Verse 14, he had spent everything and there arose a mighty famine in the land and he began to be in want. It isn't enough that he raced...wasted his substance but now there's a famine in the land, food is at a premium, he can't get a job and nobody is going to give him anything. He's out of money and the famine has hit. Food is scarce, food is high priced. Nobody is giving it away and nobody is offering jobs because there's no money for anything but food.

In verse 15 he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. A Jew feeding pigs? I mean, you can't get any lower than that. How degrading. Leviticus 11:7 says they were unclean, what's he doing feeding them? The old saying among the Jews was, "May a curse come upon the man who cares for swine." That's how low it is, that he is stooped, he would have fained filled his belly, verse 16 says, with the husks. Literally the word is carob pods. He would have filled his belly with the carob pods that were the food for the pigs but nobody would give him the pig food because you couldn't eat a human, so you fed a pig because you could eat a pig. Humans drained the resources. Pigs were the resources. Pigs were more valuable than people so nobody gave Him anything.

Verse 17, "He came to himself." Disillusionment began to set in and he finally came to his senses. "And he began to reason, How many of my fathers hired servants have bread enough and to spare and I am perishing with hunger?" By the way, the word "hired servant" is most interesting. It doesn't mean a household slave, it doesn't mean a contracted servant, it means a day laborer. He says even the people passing down the road that my father hire for one day's work have food to eat. Even the day laborers. Even the guys that just hook on for the spare days.

Verse 18, "I will arise and go to my father and say to him," and he rehearses his little speech, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy day laborers." Just treat me like a guy who hooks on for a day so I have something to eat. Now some people have said that he had an ill advised motive because his motive was food. But

listen, it went much deeper than that. He didn't just go with the plan to say to I'm hungry, he went with the plan to say I have...what?...I have sinned. I believe it's a classic confession. I believe he really expressed the sorrow in his heart. And it wasn't the sorrow that he had lost his fortune and it wasn't the sorrow that he didn't have any food. He wasn't sorrowful for what he lost, he was sorrowful for what he had done. And that's classic confession. When you're only sorry that you got caught, or you're only sorry that your resources are gone, that's not true repentance. But when you're sorry because you've sinned against heaven, a Jewish euphemism for God because they wouldn't speak His name, when you've sinned against God and you're sorry, that's classic confession.

And so he comes to his father, verse 20, "And he arose and came to his father." Oh, I love that. Jesus didn't say he went to his home, he returned to his farm, he came to his village, He says he went to his...what?...father, it was the relationship Jesus was emphasizing, not the location. And what happened? I love this, here's the main character in the story, "When he was yet a great way off his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."

You know what happened? "The son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son," and before he could even say "make me as one of your day laborers," the father set the party in motion, see. You want to know what God's like? That's what God's like.

I heard a speaker say one time when I was very young, how anxious is God for you to come to Him? So anxious that He embraces you with love and kisses you when hears the "ssss" of sorry, that's how anxious. He didn't even get his proposal out. Jesus emphasizes the father's welcome to an unworthy son. That's what God's like.

Listen, people, the pagans may crawl to a temple in fear, the religions of the world may shudder at the thought of their god heaping judgment, systems of man-made religion may worry that God is angry with them, but Jesus says he ran in compassion and fell on his neck and kissed him...that's God...that's God. Listen, verse 22, "The father said to his servants, O bring the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and kill it and let's eat and be merry for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and he's found and they began to be merry." That's God's attitude...that's God's attitude.

Just to prove it to you, look back at verse 8 chapter 15. "When a woman having ten pieces of silver loses one piece, doesn't she light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently till she find it? And when she's found it she calls her friends and her neighbors together saying, Rejoice with me for I have found the piece which I had lost. And He says, Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over...what?...one sinner that repents." You see, that's just another illustration of the Father's joy when a sinner comes, see.

Now listen, I want to stop at the story at verse 24, I want to wind it up but I want you to get these points. Now listen. As I read this story this week it dawned on me like a bolt out of the sky that the same five truths I saw in John 5 are illustrated right here, that Jesus is giving here the illustration for the theological statement of John 5. What was the first great truth that Jesus uttered in John 5? The Father is what? One with His Son...the Father is one with His Son. Look at verse 19, he says, "I'm no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants, that's going to be my speech. I'm going to go and just ask to be a servant." But he gets there and in verse 21 before he can even get it out of his mouth the father embraces him and loves him and gets a feast going and says, "This my son," verse 24. The Father sees the relationship restored. He sees His dead son alive, His lost son found. And so does Jesus say in John 14, "I go to prepare a place for you because in My Father's house are many dwelling places." It doesn't say mansions in the Greek. Heaven isn't a bunch of mansions down this street and four blocks over there and six to the right is yours, it says this, "In My Father's house are many rooms." I'm not living six blocks to the right and down a block, I'm living in the Father's house. I'm one of His family. That's the kind of God I have. He's one with His sons. Tremendous truth.

Secondly, the father loves his son. Verse 20, "But when he was yet a great way off his father saw him." How do you think he saw him? You know why he saw him? Guess what the father had been doing since he went away...what? Watching for him...watching for him. The father saw him when he was a long way off and he knew he was his son. How do you know? I'll tell you how, a father knows what his son walks like. I can look in a crowd and pick out my kids just the way their head bobs...the way they move their feet. The father loves the son. He saw him. He's always the initiator...always the initiator. He goes to find the son, he's out there scanning the road. That's the parable in verse 3 of chapter 15, look at it. A man has a hundred sheep, he loses one, doesn't he leave the 99 and go into the wilderness to find that which is lost? And when he's found it he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing and he comes home and he says, Rejoice. And that is showing you another picture of God. God is the seeker, not man, you see? God is the initiator. God is the one who in love embraces and carries us along. That's the kind of love He has and so when he was a long way off he saw him. And he didn't wait for a speech and he didn't say, "Well, I wonder what he's going to say when he gets here? How's he going to handle this?" He doesn't wait for a speech, he has compassion. He was moved with pity in his bowels, the Greek says, his stomach begin to churn and the emotion turned over in his stomach and he was feeling deeply the love of his son. And he ran, old man that he was, and he ran because God is always the runner after men. He is always the initiator of salvation.

And the Bible says he fell on his neck, a passionate embrace. And then it says he kissed him, and it uses the term in the Greek that means he kissed him repeatedly and fervently, just kissed him and kept on kissing him and kissing him and kissing. That's God, see, that's God, people. People say, "Oh," a lady came up to me the other day and she said, "Oh, you know, I've sinned in my life," and she said, "I'm so afraid God won't accept me." Not the God that Jesus talked about, He'll accept you.

In fact, He'll run and embrace you before you utter a word. The Father loves.

Listen, people, that's what God's like. He makes His children one with Him and He loves His children. Recently a fellow was telling about a young person that died and he was expressing the trials that they went through and he told this story. He said someone imagined that they died and went to heaven. He walked up to the Father and embraced Him in love and said, "Father, I'm here." And the Father said, "Son, I've been waiting for you." Together they looked back over the life of that individual. And as they looked back over the life of the individual the person noticed that there were two footsteps going along through life every once in a while, and sometimes there were four footprints. And so he said, "Father, I understand the four footprints, that's when You walked with me. But, Father, what are the two footprints?" And the Father smiled and said, "Oh, those are the time I had to carry you."

That's how it is with the Father. He loves His children. He'll walk with them. And if He has to, He'll carry them.

There's a third thing I saw here, the same that Jesus talked about in John 5. The Father blesses His children. And even if you're a penitent sinner who deserves nothing and you come back, what does He say? Verse 22, "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Shoes on his feet." Why the best robe? Listen to me, folks. You know what the best robe meant? That was the sign of belonging in the family. When you wore the robe, the family robe, that was your identity. He's one of us. Shoes on his feet, what is that? Slaves went barefoot. Free men wore shoes. Free men wear shoes, slaves go barefoot. You put on your shoes, I've set you free, you're a son not a slave. And he blessed him. And then he called for the fatted calf and he called for a feast and he called for merriment and they sang and they made music and they celebrated and they danced. The father blesses his son.

You say, "But the boy didn't deserve it." That's not the point, it's the nature of the father that is the issue. If God gave us what we deserved, we could pack up the world and just forget it. Once Abraham Lincoln was asked how he was going to treat the rebellious southerners who had brought about slavery when he finally defeated the south and returned it to the union of the United States. He..."What are you going to do, President, with these rebellious southerners?" To that Lincoln replied, "I will treat them as if they had never done anything." And I guess that's the wonder of God's love, isn't it? That He could treat a son like this, not unlike you and me, in spite of what we've done.

Fourthly, he gave authority to his son. You'll notice in verse 22, very quickly, he says, "Put a ring on his hand." This is a signet ring and symbolizes family authority. When anything was done officially by the family, it was sealed and the signet ring of the family was impressed in the seal. And that was authority. If you had that ring, you could literally sign with the seal of the family. And just as God committed all authority to the Son, so marvelously when you become a child of God does God commit His authority to you. You can act in His behalf. Acts 1, "After the Spirit is come upon you you

shall be My witnesses." You will act in My behalf. "Whoever sins you remit shall be remitted. Whoever sins you retain shall be retained. Here are the keys to the Kingdom, go to it. You are My emissaries, you are an ambassador of Jesus Christ," 2 Corinthians 5.

Beloved, think of it. God has made us one with Him. God has loved us. God has blessed us. God has given us authority to act in His behalf in the world. And even put His Son in us so that we may manifest Christ.

Finally, we said that in John 5 Jesus said that God honored His Son and surely we see that here, don't we? He said at the end of verse 23, "Let us eat and be merry." He commanded everybody to celebrate, everybody to honor that son that had been dead and was now alive.

You say, "John, what's this story really saying in its context?" Listen, don't miss this. Jesus is talking to the Jews. Covenant wise they were all sons of God. According to the Abrahamic covenant they were children of God, children by circumcision, children physically. But some of them were wayward sons who had gone off and flirted with other gods and committed their spiritual adulteries. They had sinned against God. They had been the prodigals. But when they came back to God He embraced them and loved them. And you and I in the same way are children of God in terms of creation, in terms of the physical. We've all been created by God. We all come under the umbrella of His providence, but some are wayward sons. And when those wayward sons come back in loving concerned repentance, He embraces them.

But there's another alternative, too, and that's the second son, and we close with this just briefly. "Now his elder son was in the field and as he came and drew near the house he heard music and dancing and he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant." Now listen, get the picture. This is the son that never went anywhere. You know who this is? The Pharisees. They hung around the temple all the time. They hung around God's skirts, as it were, all the time. They were always involved in the religious stuff, they never drifted away. They kept the letter of the law.

Look what it says down there in verse 29, "These many years have I served thee, I have never transgressed your commandment and you never gave me any feast." You know why? Because you never knew you were a sinner. And so you have the irreligious man embraced and the religious man turned away. And they proved the falseness of their religion. Their whole attitude shows that their obedience was out of a grim duty, not love. The attitude of an utter lack of sympathy, they treat their brother in such a horrible way, self-righteous. Why is my father doing this for him? He's a sinner. Remember the story of the Publican and the sinner? Went in the corner, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." And the Pharisee said, "I thank You that I'm not like this dirty sinner." That's the older brother.

Well how did the father treat the older brother? O I love this. Verse 31, "He said, Son, son," the Pharisees were within the purview of the Abrahamic covenant, they had received the physical seed of Abraham, they were the recipients of the covenants and the adoptions and the promises as Romans 9:4 and 5 tells. They had it all there. And he says, "Son, you're ever with me and all that I have is yours." It's all yours for the taking and you've always hung around. And it's yours. Oh what a loving Father, He loves even the legalists, He loves even the Pharisee. "But it was so fitting that we should make merry and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive, was lost and found."

Listen, do you see the love of God there? See what kind of Father He is? He loved so much the one who came back and He loved no less the one who didn't, even though he stayed around the religious things he never knew God and never tapped His resources.

The story never ends, it never tells what happened to the older brother. You know why? Because when Jesus preached this message, the story hadn't been told. We know how it ended. The Pharisees cried for His blood. And if the story had run full course, the elder brother would have turned his back on his father.

What is God like? You know what He's like? I'll tell you what He's like. He can see in the worst sinner, the vilest sinner something glorious and magnificent and He wants to set His affection on it, make it one with Himself, love, bless, give authority to and honor that individual. Ben Haden was saying that when he was a young man, he's a preacher at the First Presbyterian Church Chattanooga. And he was saying that when he was a young man a very important dignitary got off the train and he was to meet him. And he walked up to this dignitary and he was trying to impress him so much and he was, you know, just doing everything protocol and they were walking along the platform at the station along the edge and a drunk, seemy, dirty character walked up and started pulling on his coat and saying, "Hey, buddy, can you spare fifty cents?" And he tried to push him away so he wouldn't intrude in their conversation and this man wouldn't be offended. And the man was persistent and he kept pulling on his coat and saying, "Can you spare 50 cents?" And finally he said, "Go away, sir, don't bother us." And the man kept up and finally he said, "I got angry and I just shoved him. And he fell off the platform into the tracks." And, of course, they stopped walking at that point and they turned around and the man looked up in his stupor and said, "You should have seen the man I was supposed to be."

You should have seen the man I was supposed to be? That's exactly what God can see, right? That's the man who comes and says I want to be the man I was supposed to be, make me the son you meant me to be. And He embraces that son. No wonder Jesus said, "Have faith in God," if that's the kind of God we can have faith in, amen? Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, thank You for the joy that's in our hearts because You ran one day and threw Your arms around us when we weren't worthy, when we didn't deserve it, but You loved us anyway.

Thank You for being such a Father to us that You are to Jesus Christ, for making us one with You, loving us, blessing us, giving us authority and honor. We praise You in Jesus' name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).