

THE ONE THING

PART FIVE – IN THE FATHER’S HOUSE

REVIEW

So we began a new series several weeks ago on the subject of learning to fellowship with God. This series is being called “The One Thing” because the Scriptures teach us that there is just one thing that is needful and vital in a believer’s life – spending time in His presence.

This comes from David’s heart in Psalm 27:4 when he said that the one thing he desired of the Lord and sought after was that he would be able to “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life.” We came to understand that this phrase described living in God’s presence every day – that is, communing with Him & coming to know Him more & more.

And we have looked at Psalm 27:8 and learned that this one thing of spending time in God’s presence is our vital need – meaning, while we might not die if we don’t plug into His presence, we won’t truly live if we don’t either. So if this is the foundational calling for all believers – to know God and have this personal and intimate relationship with Him – then why would we think that our life will ever feel complete without this fellowship with the Lord? Friends, it is simply unreasonable for a Christian to think that they will ever be truly satisfied & content without having a good and healthy relationship with God. It will be like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole because you can be sure that if you are not fulfilling this primary purpose for your existence that you will try to cram something else into that void – whether that be relationships, fame, money, hobbies, etc.

Church, this is why we are here! It’s God’s purpose for creating us – for Him. God wants to know us and wants us to know Him. This is His one desire!

So over the past couple of weeks, we have been getting into some practical things that illustrate to us how to fellowship with God.

Two weeks ago, we looked at the primary vehicle that we use to fellowship with God – prayer. We learned what prayer is, what it is not, and how we can communicate with God more effectively through it.

Then last week, we moved into one of the relationships we have in life that the LORD used to illustrate our covenant with Him. So allow me to reiterate the point I made last week, so that we can move into what the Holy Spirit has for us this week ...

TWO KINDS OF RELATIONSHIPS

You see, God desires you and I to become a part of His family and then for us to pursue this close, personal relationship with Him as any family member would have with one another.

How do I know this? Well, when one studies God's Word, one thing becomes very apparent: God is a family-oriented God. He created man in His likeness and image, so therefore, these desires we have for relationships (i.e. the love for our husband or wife and the love for our parents or children) are God-instilled and originated from Him.

So it should be rather obvious to us that family and relationships have been God's idea from the beginning. In other words, if God is the Author and Originator of the family, it should be quite obvious that relationships are important to Him.

You see, many of the way things are in this world are a mirror of the way things are in God's kingdom. The Lord created things the way they are in this world, minus all the curse and sin that is in it. Therefore, when you consider one of the greatest gifts of life – which are the relationships we have – we are looking into a big part of God's heart and into His plan for His creation.

So to use terminology we are familiar with: God is a “family guy!” More accurately, you could say that He is the “family God.” This becomes even clearer if you consider the examples He uses to illustrate the covenants he has made with man over the centuries.

And this is exactly what we are going to talk about at least over the next couple of messages in this series – the two kinds of relationships God uses to describe our new and better covenant with Him. And in doing so, we will discover that God is truly a “Family God!”

In studying the New Testament, we see two predominant relationships that are meant to exemplify our covenant with God: the relationship between a husband and a wife (us playing the role of the bride of Christ) and the relationship between a father and his children (God being our Father and we being His children). These two kinds of relationships are the two most often used analogies meant to describe our union with God under this new and better covenant.

So why do you suppose God used these two examples to illustrate our union with Him? Again, it is because God believes in the family and in relationships! He is a family-oriented Creator and desires the relationship and fellowship of His creation!

Now here is a good question: Since these two kinds of relationships are used to describe our relationship with God, do you suppose we could look at these two kinds of natural relationships and learn something more about what God desires out of us in our relationship with Him? Absolutely! There is no doubt that we can look into what makes a good and healthy relationship between a parent and a child and between a husband and a wife and, therefore, see what would improve the quality of our relationship with God.

So last week, we started looking at what makes these two kinds of natural relationships healthy and prosperous and, in turn, learn how we can develop our relationship with God. We did so by looking at (on Father's Day of all days) the first relationship we have in life, the father and son relationship. We looked at how the fear of God, faith in God, and love for God show how a good relationship is fostered by a child towards his or her father. We looked at how praise & worship is also a way to bless our Heavenly Father and it tends towards knowing Him.

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON?

Now this week, I want us to go a little deeper in this look at the father / son relationship by looking at one of the most popular parables that Jesus ever gave us – what is commonly referred to as “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” found in Luke chapter 15. But is that really an accurate title for this parable? I don't believe so.

You see, the word “prodigal” itself simply describes the spending of money or resources in a wasteful, reckless, and extravagant way—which is exactly what this younger son did in this parable, thus the name given to him. Yes, he certainly took his portion of His father's inheritance and “wasted” it on “wild” and “reckless” living (See verse 13). But is that really the emphasis of this parable – this young man's waste of his father's money? No, it's not. Now it is certainly a part of the story, but it's not the purpose of this parable. The purpose of this parable was not his poor choices, but the reconciliation that was found in the midst of his poor choices.

Not only this, but this parable isn't even just about this younger son. While it certainly teaches us about the lost son—how we all were once lost in sin and how we are to return to the Lord through repentance when we stray—this parable involves other characters ...

Notice how in verse 11, Jesus said that a certain man had two sons. So, there is not just the prodigal son. There is also another son—the elder son—whom we find to represent the religious leaders of Jesus' day who found fault in Jesus' acceptance of the sinners and tax collectors.

So the only thing I have ever heard explained about this parable other than it being about the prodigal son was that it was a story to teach us about both sons. But I am here to submit to you today that this parable is actually meant to teach us about three people, not just one or two. Yes, it's meant to teach us about the younger, prodigal son. Sure, it's meant to teach us about the elder, self-righteous son. But it also teaches us about the loving father of both sons, which is an obvious type of our Heavenly Father.

So what I want to do this morning is to focus on all three of this parable's characters because I believe this paints a beautiful picture of how fellowshiping with God in His presence is supposed to look like. But before we do, let's look back quickly at the beginning of this chapter because this parable is not the only one Jesus taught in this setting ...

LOVE FOR THE LOST

In **Luke 15:1-2**, we are told – *“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.’”*

Notice here that the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to hear Him. You could say that they were drawn to Him. And why? Because He obviously showed unconditional love towards them. He did not act “holier than thou” and look down on them. He showed them that they had value by spending time with them, instructing them in the ways of God.

Now it is important to understand that God hates sin and He was certainly not condoning their inappropriate lifestyles. But at the same time, you do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. In other words, there is a difference between the person and the filth they are living in. That is not who God created them to be and buried underneath their sinful behavior lies the one God created in His own likeness and image.

And this is what love does: It sees beyond the actions and sees who God created them to be. Hey, this is what He does. He looks at the finished product and all our potential and does not focus on the mess we currently are in. This is the eye of love—to look at others through rose colored glasses. But the problem is we tend to do the opposite: We look at ourselves through rose colored glasses and at everyone else through a microscope. The opposite should be true. We are to only judge ourselves and give great grace to everyone else.

Now notice verse 2: The Pharisees could not believe that the man of God received sinners and ate with them. This is what a spirit of religion acts like. It has no true value for people and looks down on those who do.

Then, beginning in verse 3 through the end of the chapter, we have three parables that the Lord told in response to the attitude of the Pharisees:

The first was the Parable of the Lost Sheep. The second was the Parable of the Lost Coin. And the third was the Parable of the Lost Son. Now what is the common theme of all three of these parables? It is the lost—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. So let’s first quickly focus on these first two parables ...

In the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, the point Jesus was trying to make to these Pharisees was that if they lost something like a sheep or a coin that had value to them, they would leave all of the rest to find the one that was lost. What this did was that it showed that they did not value these lost sinners the way they valued their own possessions—namely things that were worth money.

But the awesome thing about all three of these parables is that they show us that God values the sinner. He will drop everything and pursue the lost with unwavering persistence—all because He dearly loves them!

Now we tend to value things, but God values people! And He values them because He loves them. You too will value what you love. So this means that God values us! He values us enough to seek us out! This is what happened in the Garden - After Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and found themselves naked, they hid themselves. Then we see God walking through the Garden. Doing what? Seeking the sinners! And this is what love does. It pursues the sinner; it doesn't run from them.

And this is what we need to understand when we sin: We are not to run from God; we need to run to Him. We need to come boldly before the throne of grace when we are in need of mercy and grace. But the mistake we make is when we sin, we tend to stop praying, reading the Word, attending times of fellowship, etc. We stop seeking God during these times when, what we should be doing is seeking Him all the more! This is when you come boldly—when you need Him, not when you think you don't.

But I can guarantee you one thing—not only should you be seeking Him when you miss it; He is seeking you when you miss it! And not to condemn you; but to restore you! He is the minister of reconciliation!

A CERTAIN FATHER

So let's now get into this third and final parable ...

Verses 11-12 say, *“Then 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 falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood.”*

Now, again, notice that in this parable the two sons are examples of us, and the father is Almighty God. Now this is a simple and elementary truth that many of us know in our heads, but do we really know it in our hearts?

If we truly saw God as our Father, then the perception of Him that many have would have to change. You see, many view God as a harsh and quick to judge God who will even place sickness and tragedy in our life to teach us something. So let me ask you a question: What if one day I took Levi's dog and threw it out in the road in front of a car to kill it and then on another, I took flue germs and intentionally put them all around him to make him sick in order to teach him some lesson? Would I ever be awarded the father of the year award and be so strongly referred to as “Trey is love”? Of course not! That would not make any sense at all! In fact, if I were known to do those types of things to Levi then I might end up on the news for child abuse!

No, the very simple truth that God is likened to a father to us in this parable and is referred to as such in many other Scriptures should teach us a very powerful truth – that God is love and He is the best, most loving and caring daddy in the whole world! He is our Heavenly Father and He is a good and loving Father. This one truth should immediately dispel many of the wrong doctrines that we have heard about God in many churches.

You see, it is extremely important to have this heart understanding that God is our Father. Why? Because it will make us approach Him in prayer much differently. If I have a need and I need to approach either my dad or my employer, there will be a big difference between how I will approach these two authority figures. If I am approaching my boss, I will come to him less confidently and even in a little fear and trembling to how he might react to my request, but if I approach my father, then I would come much more boldly and confidently to ask him. There is no comparison.

This is exactly the point Jesus was making when He began His teaching on prayer with “Our Father, who is in heaven ...”

First of all, let me say that although this is commonly known as “The Lord’s Prayer” to many, it would be more correctly referred to as “The Model Prayer” because Jesus was not teaching His disciples what to pray; He was teaching them how to pray. Notice that He said, “In this manner, therefore, pray ...” This means that He was not giving them the words to pray; He was giving them a guideline or an outline of the best manner in which to pray.

So when He began the prayer with “Our Father”, He was actually teaching them a revolutionary truth. You see, this concept that God is our Father was new to them. It was a new covenant reality that Jesus brought with Him and practiced regularly Himself.

So what Jesus was conveying to them in “The Model Prayer” was that the first thing we need to possess in approaching God in prayer is the revelation that we are approaching our Father. Therefore, we are coming to Him in a completely different manner than most ever realize. We are approaching Him in complete confidence—knowing that since He is our Father, we can count on Him lovingly giving us the things we ask of Him. And this leads me to the next point ...

THE FATHER’S LIVELIHOOD

Another powerful truth about the nature of our Heavenly Father in this verse is that when the younger son came to ask him for his portion of his father’s inheritance, the father did not say no.

Now consider this for a moment: Number one, don’t you think it is a little inappropriate for this son to come to his father prematurely and ask for his part of the inheritance? How would you feel if your children came to you and asked you for their portion of your will now? This is amazing that this younger son had the audacity to do this! But what is even more amazing is that there is no evidence that the father ever ridiculed him for this, and then that he gave it to him! Ask and you shall receive, right?

This, to me, shows a wonderful thing about the nature of our Heavenly Father: Many times, we think God thinks and acts like we would, but this is simply untrue. The Bible refers to us as evil in comparison to Him and if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our

children, how much more will our Heavenly Father who is love give good gifts to those who ask Him. In other words, He will not reproach us or rebuke us for ever asking Him for anything that might be inappropriate or presumptuous if it falls under our inheritance. He wants to give it to us!

But some think that God says no sometimes if He knows that what we are asking for will hurt us because it is used incorrectly, but this is simply untrue. How can I say this, you ask? Well, look at the example we have in this parable ...

If this father is likened to our Father God, wouldn't He have known what this premature withdrawal of His inheritance would do to the younger son? And He gave it to him anyways! Friends, I am telling you that God is the greatest Giver that exists, and He said that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, and if He hears us, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him. It also says that when we ask, He gives to all liberally and without reproach. The problem lies in our asking and receiving, not in His giving. We ask timidly and in unbelief and then at other times we do not even ask because we feel like we are asking too often or for too much.

The other awesome truth about **verse 12** is that not only did the father give the younger son his portion of the inheritance when he asked, but this Scripture says that the father *"divided to them his livelihood."* In other words, he did not just give it to the one who asked; he gave it to both of them in advance.

Now the important truth to understand here is that the older son apparently never took or used his portion of the inheritance because we see at the end of this parable that this son was still working for his father in the field and, by his own testimony, he was busy with serving his father for years. He also said that his father had never even given him a goat to have fun with his friends.

Now this one thing is obvious: He must have never asked! I guess he just assumed if it was his father's will, his father would have given him all of these things. But is that true? Did the father not tell him in verse 31 that he was always with him and all that he had was his? He sure did! So, this should illustrate to us a very important truth: If we do not receive our inheritance, it is not because our Father did not will for us to have it and did not give it to us. It is because we did not take advantage of all that was already ours!

On a side note, notice that at the end of verse 12 that it says that it was the father's "livelihood" that he divided to his two sons. What is one's livelihood? It is what they worked for, right! Well, friends, God has made available to us what He has already worked for and earned for us. So we do not need to work for or earn our inheritance. It is ours by way of the new birth, and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not our livelihood (i.e. what we worked for); it is His livelihood (i.e. what He worked for)!

HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU

So moving on to **verse 13**, we are told that this younger son “gathered all together”—meaning that this was not one of those one foot in and one foot out kind of things. No, he wasn’t planning on coming back. He gave everything over to the flesh and to sin. Then Jesus said that he “journeyed to a far country”, which describes that he “went into the world.” And there, we are told that he “wasted his possessions on prodigal living”—which describes him recklessly throwing everything he had down the tubes.

And as **verse 14** goes on describe, this is always the end result of sin—the severe famine will come, and we will be in “want.” **Romans 6:23** teaches us that the wages of sin is death. Sin will always 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. A spiritual famine always follows a sinful harvest. Remember dat. No, sin does not affect God’s love for you, but it certainly affects the devil’s inroads into your life.

Then, beginning with **verse 15**, we see how this man wound up getting into such a desperate situation that he began to work for a man, feeding his swine, and had to resort to eating the pigs’ food because no one would give him anything. So this was the situation that this younger son found himself in by his wasteful living. And this prompted him to realize something ...

In **verses 17-19**, Jesus said, *“But 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 to 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.’ ”*

Now these verses teach us not only what true repentance is, but they also teach us how God responds to true repentance: Notice that the prodigal son first “came to himself”... This means, as Hebrews 10:23 says, he was “illuminated.” In other words, the light turned on! He saw the light and realized what he had done and what he needed to do.

Then in the rest of verses 17-19 we see the son realizing what he had done and even rehearsing in his mind what he needed to do. Then in verse 20 he backed up the decision he made beforehand with the works of repentance.

But I just love this next part that we see **verse 20**: After he saw the light, made the decision to return, and then backed up that decision with the fruits of repentance, his father was looking for him and saw him while he was *“a great way off.”* This teaches us a very important point—that our Heavenly Father seeks us even when we are a great way off.

You’ll have people say, “Oh, I have just done too many bad things”, “I have fallen too greatly” or “I’m just too far gone” but this is when these need to look at this one powerful phrase – that even when this prodigal son was a great way off his father was looking for him. Wow! That is awesome! In other words, it’s not just when you have departed from

the Lord a little bit that He seeks you, it is even when you are a “great way off” that His eyes are inclined towards you.

This is important to understand because the devil just loves to feed us the lie that because we’ve missed it a bunch of times or we’ve done too many bad things that forgiveness is no longer an option. But this is a lie! God is not sitting up in heaven taking account of how many times we’ve missed it in a certain area and then once we pass that threshold, He won’t grant us mercy any longer.

First Corinthians 13:5 tells us that *“love thinks no evil.”* This word “thinks” is actually an accounting term that literally means to “count or take account of.” So what this verse is saying is that love takes no account of a suffered wrong. In other words, love is not counting and calculating the sins of others against itself. So God, who is love, is not doing this either! He is not counting our mistakes! As a matter of fact, He is separating them – as far as the east is from the west – not to remember them anymore! So not only is God not counting them and taking account of them; they are not even on His desk anymore! He sent the record of them to the shredder! Hallelujah!

Then we are told that when the father saw him, he had compassion - not he had anger, animosity, or ill-will towards him. No, he had compassion. Likewise, our Father God does not look on us with anger when we’ve missed it, but He looks on us with mercy and compassion—sympathizing with us in our infirmities. This is a far cry from what most Christians believe about their God.

Psalm 103 says that as a father pities (i.e., has compassion on) his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. (Why?) For He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust.” You see, the Lord understands our weaknesses. We have a merciful and faithful high priest who can sympathize with us in our weaknesses because He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. He knows what it is like to walk in this fleshly body and how it wants to go diametrically opposed to the will of God. He knows this. Therefore, He has compassion on us and desires to work with us, helping us to overcome.

This is why we see in the next verse the Father going out to meet him on his road back to the father’s house. You see, **James 4:8** says that when we draw near to God that He draws near to us. In other words, He does not make us make the journey back to Him on our own! Praise God! Once we make the decision to repent and make a step or two in the right direction, He meets us on the road and gives us more grace for the journey. In other words, He gives you the grace and strength to repent and does not make you do it all on your own. This is the grace of our Heavenly Father!

Then notice what happened next: This ought to upset most of our theology even more ... *“and (He) ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”* How many of you have seen those coke zero commercials where the word “and” is emphasized? Well, this is what is being done here! Not only was the father looking for him while he was a great way off and had compassion on him, he also ran to him. Then he also fell on his neck. On top of that, he kissed him.

Notice the picture of our Heavenly Father that is being painted here ... Did you know that God is so in love with you that when He sees you coming that He runs to you. He does not just sit there and lounge around until you get to him. He doesn't just take His time walking to you. He runs to you! When I read this, I think of that image of a couple who is madly in love with each other and how they are running through an open field covered with flowers towards each other. This should illustrate to us just how excited God is about us!

Then we see how his father fell on his neck and then kissed him! What a beautiful picture of the love of our God! When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. But He does not just draw near to us complacently; He draws near to us in a full sprint! And then when He gets to us, He embraces us and kisses us. Friends, I can assure you that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man the greatness of God's love for us!

Then in **verses 21-22**, notice what happened next ... The son begins his rehearsed confession about what he had done and how unworthy he is, then in verse 22 it begins with *"But the father said to his servants ..."* Underline that word "but" because it shows us that God ignores our rehearsed confessions. What He hears is when we make that decision in our heart and have corresponding actions. He is not as interested in our works and the penance that we feel we need to pay.

You see, we are the ones who feel that we need to say or do certain things in order to get back in God's good graces. But in many of those cases, God is not interested at all in our tears, words, or actions when we have already returned to Him in our hearts. All He is interested in is the fact that we are there with Him at that moment talking to Him. It is us that feel like we need to "do something."

ROBE, RING, AND SANDALS

No, *"but the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet'."* Let's look at these three items in detail ...

First of all, notice that the Father said to bring out the best robe and put it on him. Now this is an easy analogy to uncover. What do the Scriptures compare a robe to? You guessed it. Righteousness is the robe! **Isaiah 61:10** says, *"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with a robe of righteousness."* But notice that it is not just any robe of righteousness that He has clothed us with. Luke 15:22 says that the father said to bring out the best robe. Now let me ask you a question: What would have been considered the best robe in the father's house? It would have been the father's very own robe! And this is exactly what our Heavenly Father has done for us ... He has not clothed us in just any righteousness; He has clothed us in His very own righteousness! **Second Corinthians 5:21** says that He who knew no sin was made to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. You see, this is not a generic righteousness we have been made. This is the righteousness OF GOD we have been given! Hallelujah!

But again, what would cause a father to give his very own robe to someone who was unworthy and undeserving? Only love. Yes, only love would do such a thing! And God the Father has clothed us in His own robe of righteousness because He has preferred us, because He delights in us, and because He loves us that much! Praise His Name!

Notice next of all that the father had his servants bring his younger son a “ring.” Now this ring in their days was a symbol of status and authority. They used signet rings in those days which were essentially their family’s checkbook or credit card. So what the father did here is very significant and a good lesson for us: This son did not have to work his way back up into the position that he fell from.

You see, most of the time we feel that when we’ve missed it that we have to rebuild God’s trust in us again and that He certainly will not let us operate in the same level of authority for a period of time. But, you see, that is how we think. God’s ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts! The moment we repent and confess, we are immediately restored into the same level of authority that we were in during the peak of our walk! Hallelujah!

And, last but not least, we see that the father told the servants to put sandals on his feet: Now the very fact that the prodigal son returned home without shoes shows how truly desperate and destitute he had become, because only slaves and servants were barefoot in those days. So the father giving him sandals again shows that, because of his great love for his son, he was completely restoring him not just to a place of right standing with Him, not just to a place of authority with Him, but also to a place of sonship with Him.

Not only that, but do you remember when the Lord began to wash His disciples’ feet at the Last Supper? He came to Peter, and Peter wanted the Lord to not just wash His feet but all of Him because he wanted all of the fellowship that he could have with the Lord. Well, Jesus responded that only his hands and feet needed to be washed because the rest of Him was already cleansed. This is a beautiful illustration of what has taken place in all of us ...

You see, when we miss it, we do not lose our right-standing with God. Our “do” does not affect our “who.” We remain cleansed by the blood, but it is our hands and our feet – the parts of us that have contact with the world – that need to be cleansed and washed.

So what the Lord was teaching His twelve disciples and us is that our position never changes when we sin, but our proverbial hands and feet do need to be sanctified. And this is what the father did to his prodigal son. By placing sandals back on his feet, he provided him with sanctification (i.e., the grace for sanctification - separated from the world and empowered to walk for the Lord). Hallelujah!

This is what is so awesome about our Heavenly Father ... He doesn’t just positionally make us right; He also gives us the strength and ability to live right! In other words, He gives us the grace to walk out who we are in Christ! And why? Because He loves us so much!

THE MERRY FATHER

Now **verse 23** goes on to say— *“And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.”*

To me, this is the culmination of the father’s love! On top of all the amazing acts of grace that He had already performed in his younger son’s life – putting Him back in right standing with him, giving him back his position of authority, and restoring him to his place of sonship—now He is putting the cherry on top by throwing a party to celebrate his son’s restoration. And this wasn’t just any old party! The father went all out by asking for “the fatted calf.”

Now by using the terminology the fatted calf, this evidently refers to not just one of the fatted calves, but it refers to the one and only fatted calf. Not that he did not have some other quality calves, but this was evidently the best and the most precious calf that he possessed.

And don’t you know that this is what our Heavenly Father does for us? He does not just give us what He can spare out of His riches! He gives us His very best every time! He proved this through the giving of His only begotten Son whom He offered up for our sins, crucifying Him on the Cross. This was not just any blood that He shed for us; it was the precious blood of Jesus Christ. This was not just any salvation that He provided; it is so great of a salvation. God the Father never does just enough; He always does more than enough!

And in the midst of these exceedingly great and precious acts of provision, God the Father is celebrating us as this father did in this parable.

Did you know that God is merry over us! The word “merry” is defined as being cheerful and lively and is characterized by festivity and rejoicing. It means to be cheerful and joyous; to be laughingly happy, festively joyous, and hilarious.

The prophet Zephaniah brings to light this side of our heavenly Father when he said in **Zephaniah 3:17**, *“The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Does this fit the picture you have of God? It doesn’t fit many of our molds of Him. I mean, can you honestly see God the Father actually getting excited over you and enveloped in gladness? Can you see Him singing songs about you full of joy? That is amazing! But it is exactly the same picture we see in Luke chapter 15! This is His heart towards us! He loves us so much that He jumps, dances, and sings over us! Praise the Lord!

Church, we have a Heavenly Father that mirrors the character of the father in this parable. He will give to us when we ask. He will look for you if you stray. He will run to you when

you return. He will restore to you everything His grace provided you with. He will even be merry over you and give to you the very best He's got. All because He loves you infinitely more than the most loving father on this earth loves his son or daughter. Believe dat!

IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE

So what I want you to see today is that in this parable there is a good, good Heavenly Father and there are two types of sons – the elder one (i.e. the religious one) who lives in his father's presence but does not really know him like he could have, and then there's the younger one who might realize how good his father is, but is not willing to live in his father's presence.

So which one are you? Are you the one who knows how to be with your Heavenly Father, but doesn't know Him like you ought? Or are you the one who has chosen to live in the world above His presence? Either way, you have a choice today – to live in His presence and partake of all of your inheritance or to not dwell in your father's house at all.

The doors to God's presence are always open for you. If you've missed it like the younger son, then just draw near to Him and He will draw near to you. If you've lived a relatively righteous life yet haven't joined the party, then open up your heart to another possibility of His presence.

We are ALL invited to experience the Father's House in this way, church! The variable is us: Are we going to choose to live there and partake of the festivities and of our inheritance? Let's do it!