

Come Home

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[0 : 00] Dear Heavenly Father, we begin by asking that the recent volcano eruption in Iceland, that it would challenge people's complacency, that many, Father, would be brought to a point where they meditate upon the things that are out of their control.

Our 21st century world, it sort of endeavours to organise itself so that there's nothing unforeseen. Everything can be scheduled and evaluated and planned for.

Even death seems to be sanitised and often hidden from view. Yet, Father, you are enthroned and the nations plot in vain against you.

Father, we ask that this volcano would be a wake-up call to our sleeping world, that many would be shaken from their complacency and given the time, Father, in your sovereignty to meditate on their place as creatures in your creation.

That they would deeply feel the frustration of life on this cursed world and seek not a home here, but a total resolution and reconciliation with the Creator and that they would meet your Son, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 32] We think of practical issues and we're pleased to see the flights have resumed today. And we give thanks, Father, for the extra time that Willie Philip and his family have had in Portugal and we ask that you'd use this time for your glory.

That they would be meditating on your word. That the family would be bonding together. That it would be a great time of recreation and intimacy with you.

So we ask that you'd use this for your glory, this extra time that they have and bring them back safely this Saturday. As we finish this little section of our prayer relating to this volcano in Iceland, we ask, Father, that all the family reunions that are going on around Britain, the repatriations that are taking place.

Even now, we ask that they would invoke a deep desire for the ultimate reconciliation which is with you. Like the return of the lost son is a parable.

We ask that these days of homecoming would be an enacted parable, Father. An enacted parable of what you are doing on the grand scale with many individuals and many families.

[2 : 58] You're drawing them to yourself. We pray, Father, for those we know who are unwell in these days. Both in body and in mind.

For those who are frail because of advanced years. For those who are meeting with consultants in the next few days.

Maybe they're apprehensive about possible conditions they may have or what their prognosis is.

We lift them to you, Father, these folk that we know.

And we ask that you would give them strength. That they would meditate on eternal realities and on your son. And be able, or better able, to endure these difficult days and put things in perspective.

We ask, Father, that you'd heighten the skills of medics. And that you would speed recovery, Father, where granted. And as we come to your word now, Father, we ask that you would help us to concentrate.

[4 : 11] To set aside pressing issues that may be even tormenting us just now. And we pray that we would meet your son, Jesus Christ, through his word.

So that our lives are harmonised and empowered by his. Forgive us our sin, we pray, Father.

And help us to repent as we ought. And we lift all these prayers to you, Father, in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen.

So, you'll find the Bible in front of you on the seat somewhere. You've perhaps put it. We're in Luke's Gospel, chapter 15. I thought we'd have a look at the prodigal son.

So, Luke chapter 15, it's on page 874, Luke chapter 15. Just have a look with me to start with it.

[5 : 14] Verses 1 and 2. They set up the whole of the chapter. We've got three parables, haven't we? The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

Look at the first two verses. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him. That's Jesus. And the Pharisees and scribes, they grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

And then Jesus teaches them on this matter. They're in the first parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. And we come to the prodigal son in verse 11.

So, if you look at verse 11 and onwards. And Jesus said, there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the share of the property that's coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country. And there he squandered his property on reckless living.

[6 : 17] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country. And he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country. Who sent him into the fields to feed the pigs.

Verse 16. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate. And no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread?

But I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father. And I will say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion.

And ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him.

[7 : 24] Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. For this son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. But it doesn't finish there, friends. Look at verse 25. Here's the older brother.

Now the older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he doesn't like it, does he, friends? Just look down there at verse 29.

He answered his father, Look, these many years I've served you, and I never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I may celebrate with my friends. He's envious and jealous.

He thinks the party should be for him. Verse 30. But when this son of yours, notice it's not my brother, but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him.

[8 : 29] And then the father tries to give him some perspective. Verse 31. The father said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. So just remember the context, friends.

Verse 1. Look down at verse 1. Just remember, Tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to listen to Jesus. Why does he do that? Why does the creator of the universe, why does he visit planet Earth?

And he's got these tax collectors and sinners. You know, you'd expect him to go and see Barack Obama, wouldn't you, or something like that? But he's not. He's there with these tax collectors and sinners.

Tax collectors, they were Jewish, and they worked for the occupying force, Rome. So they were actually traitors, and they were hated by the Jewish people. And then there's the sinners, isn't there?

[9 : 32] The dregs of society. Today it should be drug addicts, joyriders, and in Glasgow the Neds. And they're all gathered around, aren't they?

With Jesus. It's like, is it, the bottom of a tower block, chatting with them. They're sat all around, listening. What's going on, friends? What's behind it all? The Pharisees, they're looking on, they're absolutely flabbergasted.

Look at verse 2. The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled. Say, this man receives sinners, and eats with them. And here's the question, friends. Why does Jesus do that?

Why is he with these sinners and tax collectors? What's going on? I went to the Philippines quite a few years back, and I flew on Emirates Air.

It was the cheapest ticket I could get at the time. And it went via Manila. And we took off from Manila for the final leg to the Philippines. And I was sat on an aisle seat next to this Filipino young man who I was chatting with.

[10:36] And I'm looking up the aisle full of anticipation for the meal coming. I like the in-flight meals. I like all the packaging. And I'm looking, waiting for the meal to come, and the stewardess is pushing the trolley towards me.

And I can smell the aroma, and I'm full of anticipation. And just in front of the trolley, this Filipino lady gets up, and she starts walking towards me down the aisle.

She's obviously had some trauma. Her face was red. There's tears streaming down her face. I didn't know what was going on. She got quite close to me, and then she stopped right next to me and thought, uh-oh, what's going to happen here?

And then she started speaking with this Filipino young man here. I think it's Tgali, the language it's called. I couldn't understand a word of it. So she was chatting away. There was tear dripping off her chin.

Obviously some big trauma in her life. I wasn't quite sure what was going on. And then she turned around, she went back to her seat. I was fascinated to know what had happened. So I said to this Filipino young man, I said, she was upset, wasn't she?

[11:49] And then he said this, and I wanted to burst out laughing, but I controlled myself. He said, she's left her sister in duty free. Back in Dubai, the plane took off without her.

I just wanted to burst out laughing, but I thought it would be inappropriate. But can you see the difference in our reactions there? It's exactly the same event. I wanted to laugh, but her sister was weeping.

She was traumatised. Does that make sense? It's the same event, but there's two different reactions. Think about this. She wasn't my sister, was she? The sister lost in duty free.

I didn't know her and love her like a sister on the plane. There wasn't that deep down sense of belonging. Friends, who do we belong to?

Can you see now why Jesus has come to visit this earth and these sinners and tax collectors are gathered around him and we hear his word through the gospel?

[12:58] We belong to him. And it's the creator of the universe tracking us down, drawing us back into a relationship with himself. It's amazing, isn't it?

You see why Jesus makes a beeline for sinners here. We all belong to him. Christianity, it's more than the forgiveness of all those sins that you've clocked up in life.

It took me ages to realise this. You know, it's being found by your creator, the one you belong to. He comes, doesn't he, to get us.

It's got massive, massive relational significance. We get reconciled, friends, to the one we belong to, the owner of the universe, our creator.

Here's the claim. The creator has broken into time-space history and he's come to find us, to track us down, you. Here it is.

[13:59] Jesus, he's sat there and he's hemmed in with sinners and tax collectors, isn't he, verse 1. And the Pharisees are listening. They're riveted. It's like they're glued to the screen and Jesus has their attention, doesn't he?

He's speaking in parables. We get the lost sheep and the lost coin and we come to this rebel of a son. Do you remember him? Wants off his dad's wealth, doesn't he?

Disappears to a foreign country. Today it would be, he takes 500,000 pounds off his father, he disappears off to Las Vegas and when he's there, he buys a Ferrari, he checks into the most expensive hotel he can find, drinking parties, buying himself flash clothes, prostitutes.

Henry Nguyen comments on this tendency in himself. He said, it's almost as if I want to prove to myself and to my world that I don't need God's love, that I can make a life on my own.

Beneath it all is that great rebellion, he says, the radical no to the father's love, which reflects Adam's original rebellion, his rejection of the God in whose love we were created and by whose love we are sustained.

[15 : 20] Leaving home, listen friends, is denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every fibre of my being. Bob Geldof, he wrote his biography, Is That It?

it's called. Is That It? Apparently, he just raised 50 million pounds for Live Aid, it was back in 1985 I think, and he was stood on the edge of the stage between two songs and there was a moment of silence, somebody shouted up, Is That It?

and Bob Geldof heard the words and he says it's a question he keeps asking himself. He looks at his life and he asks himself, Is That It?

and he was interviewed by Mick Brown of the Times newspaper and Mick Brown says that when I asked Geldof whether or not he was fulfilled, this was his reaction.

He says, No, not at all. I don't know what that would mean. I'm unfulfilled, Bob Geldof says, as a human being. Although, why are these large holes here? And he was apparently thumping his chest.

[16 : 32] And friends, this is life, isn't it? Without Jesus. And we see it all around, don't we? Look at the world. There's something missing. You know, there's a sense in which our deepest meaning in life, it isn't to be found, is it friends, by achieving our goals.

Part of us isn't satisfied. And money had offered this son so much, but it didn't deliver, did it? His dreams are now shattered.

Am I describing somebody today? And what are the Pharisees thinking at this point? What's going through their minds? Well, they'll like the sound of verses 14 and 15.

Look at this. And when he spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into the fields to feed pigs.

And at this point, the Pharisees probably look at each other with glee. Just what he deserved, Jesus. Rub his nose in it. Let's have some more as far as these Jewish Pharisees were concerned.

[17 : 48] Well, feeding pigs, it just can't get any worse than that. Leave him in the gutter. And so here he is, this younger son. Things haven't worked out, have they?

What's he going to do? What's he going to do now? Do you remember how he set out? He set out, didn't he? Longing, longing for his father's things. Look where he's ended up, friends, in verse 16. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate. And no one gave him anything. So here he is.

He's a long way from home. He's tried hard and things aren't right. And he feels it deep down inside. He's in this strange country. He knows he's gone the wrong way in life.

And as he looks at the pig food, friends, his tummy rumbling. Reality begins to kick in. He's sort of worked it out, hasn't he?

[18 : 54] And often there comes a point, there comes a point, friends, in life when our desperation, it gets one notch higher than our pride.

And that's where this lad is now. He can feel it, can't he? Deep down inside. Ever been there? Am I describing somebody today?

Henry Nguyen says this, just listen to this. I'm hoping I'm pronouncing his surname properly. I'm not quite sure. He hit the bedrock of his sonship. In retrospect, it seems that the prodigal had to lose everything to come into touch with the ground of his being.

Aren't they marvellous words? I'd love to write something like that. When he found himself desiring to be treated as one of the pigs, he realised that he was not a pig, but a human being, a son of his father.

And so, verse 17, it starts with some beautiful words. The son was lost, but up until this point, he'd probably not realised it. Look, friends, at verse 17.

[20 : 07] But when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger?

He's worked it out, hasn't he? We, like sheep, have gone astray. Even us Christians, we go each to our own way, don't we? And this son has realised, hasn't he, that he belongs to God.

And God is still God, and we still belong to him, don't we, friends, wherever we are in life. Think about this, we can't shake off his image, can we?

And we can come to a place like this, where we hear him as we open his word, and he calls us. It's like the dungeon flames with light.

And those first few words of verse 17 are lovely, aren't they? When he came to himself. And what does he do, verse 18? I will arise. That's repentance, he's going back to his father.

[21 : 13] And so he saunters off home, doesn't he? I suppose he's very embarrassed, feeling guilty, and he just shuffles off home. He just wants to be a servant now.

That's all he wants. He's blown it as a son. I like it when he's trying to explain all this to his dad, isn't he? He says, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

And it's like his dad's not listening. His dad just turns around to the servants, and he says, quick, bring the best robes, put a ring on his finger, sandals for his feet, let's have a feast and celebrate. It's amazing, isn't it? So the son had discovered how things really were, and he turned back to his father, and amazingly, everything is restored.

You know, we could never dare to hope that God would be like that, could we? Knowing ourselves, it would be too much to ask for.

[22 : 17] But Jesus is saying, this is how it is, for tax collectors, for sinners, and for you, and for me. It's amazing, isn't it?

Whatever your past may have been, he wants you, he's tracking you down, seeking you. Think about this, he's entered, hasn't he, a foreign country, our world, to meet us, and talk with us. Doesn't this connect somewhere deep down, friends? There's a little booklet here, it explains about being a Christian, it explains the predicament that we're in, and how Jesus came to forgive us from our sin.

There's a pile of them on a glass table, as you leave, you're welcome to take one, with you. There's even a prayer in the back, you can become a Christian today. Why not seize the moment, friends? Take one with you. We finish with those Pharisees. They asked that question, didn't they, in verse 2, and Jesus has given them the explanation, but Jesus isn't finished with them.

[23 : 26] They get painted into the parable, and this, friends, is where it's all been heading, the Pharisees today. They'd be folk who maybe dig their feet in when it comes to evangelism, or, you know, perhaps they just don't like all the mess, you know, when somebody comes to God and is transforming their lives, God and the lost son.

And the brother, Willie, doesn't like all the fuss. He thinks he deserves all the attention, but the father, friends, he wants to give him some perspective.

So, verse 32, it was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.

what a contrast there. Did you notice those contrasts in that verse, 32? The lost son, he was dead and now he's alive.

He was lost and now he's found. It's a dead world out there, isn't it, friends? Since Genesis chapter 3, people have been dead.

[24 : 38] He was dead, said Jesus, but he's alive. And the creator is walking his planet. Here he is, friends, the one we belong to, the one who made us, is recreating, giving life to the dead, new life the dead receive, wrapping his arms around us.

Don't we all long for these things? No wonder there's a party going on. Good, isn't it? Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we once again thank you for sending your son into this world, this world that's rejected you.

Yet, Father, in your mercy and your goodness and your forbearance, we have a gospel to proclaim and we have your son to meet. So we thank you for that and we pray Father that you'd enable us all to be a conduit of your grace and take this message out into our lost world.

And so Father, to those ends we pray that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit would be with us this day and forever more.

Amen. Amen.