

“GRACE ALL THE WAY HOME (#1): THE REBELLIOUS HEART”

(Luke 15:11-24)

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--I--

1. [BOTH Services...] Read CEB Text: Luke 15:11-24.
2. [WATCH VIDEO: "Young Prodigal" from [SermonSpice.com](https://www.sermonspice.com) (Time: 4:38)]
3. The story of the prodigal son is perhaps the most famous parable in the Bible, and has been called by some the greatest short story in the world.

A--And if you were a Jewish person living in the time of Jesus, you would have already known this story -- it was *not* one that Jesus himself made up.

B--However, what we saw here in today's video was how the story was *supposed* to end as *usually* told in that day and time: the prodigal comes home, but instead of finding a waiting father, he returns home to find himself forgotten and no longer welcomed -- it was a parable warning listeners that if you forsake "home," then *you're on your own!*

C--Yet, that's *not* how *Jesus* told it, right? No, when *he* told it, he *changed* the ending, and surprised everyone!

D--And when he did that, what he was actually doing -- both for his audience *then*, and for us *today* -- was teaching them (& us) the radical, surprising nature of the **Grace of God**

4. Now, our understanding of grace today comes from two biblical terms: the Hebrew term *hen*; and the Greek term *charis* -- both of which literally refer to *graciousness, favor, benefit, or acceptance that is undeserved, yet given*.<sup>1</sup>

A--Because of its charitable nature, "grace" is often confused both with "justice" and "forgiveness/mercy,"<sup>2</sup> and yet it involves *far more* than either of these. It's like this:

1--"Justice" is **when when we get what we deserve** -- we sneak into the kitchen and eat the cookies we weren't supposed to eat, so mom sends us to our room, and takes away dessert for the next week. That's justice! (& it's what the Jewish tradition of Jesus' day expected you to give prodigals who run away from home)

2--"Mercy/forgiveness" is **when we don't get what we deserve** -- we sneak and eat the cookies. But instead of punishing us, mom just gives us a stern warning.

3--But "Grace" is **when we get what we don't deserve**--we sneak into the kitchen, eat the cookies, and seem to get away with it. But that evening when we come to dinner, we find the cookie jar sitting in front of our place at the table, overflowing with more of the same cookies that we snuck earlier!

4--So Grace, then, is literally "*unmerited favor*" for us from someone else.

B--And *this*, of course, is WHY it's so important in our lives as Christians -- because without Grace, we could never earn or deserve a relationship with God.

1--Think about it... if God was *only* a God of **justice**, then we should expect to be punished by Him for the hurt we cause to ourselves and others.

2--If God was *only* a God **mercy/forgiveness**, then even though we're *not punished* us for our wrongdoings, neither are we *worthy* of life with God -- you see, forgiveness absolves us of the guilt of our crimes, but it doesn't bring about relational restoration.

3--But **grace** does all of this: Grace is not only God choosing to look *past* our sin and wrongdoing (i.e., forgiveness) but ALSO is God *going further* by giving us the very *best* very *best* of His love and Himself (represented by Jesus) -- and in so doing, it enables us to have a relationship with God.

C--I can think of plenty of times in my life where I did or said things that I regretted.

1--And I'm so very grateful that in those times, God didn't deal with me according only justice or even mercy, but with grace.

2--Sure, there were usually *consequences* for my actions that I had to repent of and make right, but God not only didn't *cast me away* because of my mistakes, but actually *lavished* me with love and attention that I *didn't* deserve -- *that's* grace!

--II--

5. So, for the next three weeks, we'll be sharing in a short series called "**Grace All The Way Home**," using the personalities of today's very famous parable from Luke 15 to talk about what God's Grace *is*, and what it *looks like* in our lives.

A--First, let's remember that Jesus tells this story (& the other two in Luke 15 <sup>3</sup>) partly as a response to the religious leaders of his day (the Pharisees & Scribes), who've been criticizing him for the way he fellowships with "undesirable" people that his tradition said he shouldn't have anything to do with. <sup>4</sup>

1--And he tells the story in such a way that it's clear that the story *personalities* are actually metaphors for his *audience*:

- (a) The father, of course, represents God.
- (b) The younger son represents the undesirable "sinners and tax collectors" with which Jesus has been associating.
- (c) And the older brother (who we'll talk about next week) represents the religious leaders/Scribes and Pharisees who've been criticizing him.

2--So, more than simply being an entertaining *story*, Jesus here was illustrating how God's Grace is *offered* to ALL people, while at the same time highlighting the hypocrisy and *lack* of Grace in the religious leaders of his day.

B--And this paradox -- e.g., that sinners *receive* grace while the righteous *lack* grace -- was both a surprise and a shock to the people in Jesus' day hearing him tell the story.

--III--

6. Now, truth be told, there's at least a little bit of "Prodigal Son" in each and every one of us, because each and every one of us has a "rebellious heart" from time to time.

A--Sometimes this takes the form of us intentionally choosing to DO things we know are contrary to the will and way of God.

1--Maybe its indulging in addictive behavior that we know is wrong,...

2...Or us passing on gossip about someone else,... (*I had a college roommate that used to say that "if it's true, it's not gossip"; That may be, but it's still wrong!*)

3...Or us judging and demeaning others simply because they're different from us in some way, or live life or faith differently, or hold views that we disagree with.

B--Sometimes our "rebellious heart" takes the form of us standing by idly and *failing to do* what we know IS the will and way of God.

1--Perhaps it's us *remaining silent* when a friend or relative tells a racist joke,...

2--...Or we justify ignoring the plight or needs or pain of others (here or elsewhere) because we smugly think "that doesn't affect me."

C--At still other times our "rebellious heart" can -- like it did with the younger son -- take the form of us of arrogantly thinking and acting like we don't need God or His family.

1--I can't begin to tell you how many times over the years I've had conversations with well-meaning people who claim that they can "be good Christians" without ever being an active part of a church family.

2--Now don't get me wrong: I'm glad *they've* figured out how to stretch and grow and learn about God *all by themselves*, and can make it through tough times *without the need for anyone else* to support or be there for them,... but I can't do that, and I really doubt that they can, either!

D--And this "rebellious" presence in *each* of our hearts reminds us that there are just as many "prodigals" *inside* the church as *outside* it, because any time we arrogantly reject our fellow humans, or try to live self-sufficient lives apart from God & His community of faith, then we (like the prodigal son) also find ourselves in the "far country."

7. But the good news from this parable that Jesus wanted both the people of *his* day & for *us* to hear today is that if this *younger son* can surprisingly be given God's Grace, then any and all of us can be given it, as well! <sup>5</sup>

A--If Grace is, indeed, "unmerited favor", then this younger son is an obvious recipient:

1--The "**robe**" he's given represents *honor* that he doesn't deserve.

2--The "**ring**" he's given to wear represents the *authority* he shouldn't have. <sup>6</sup>

3--"**Sandals**" (like the ones he received) were only given to *children and heirs* of a household, not to slaves or servants (who went barefoot).

4--And finally, a "**fatted calf**" (like the one here) was an expensive luxury that would only be killed and eaten for very, very special occasions, like a king -- it wasn't slaughtered for just *anyone*, especially not for someone (like a prodigal) who *intentionally* rejects his family!

B--And yet, all of this generosity -- this "unmerited favor" -- is *given* to the younger son when he returns home. <sup>7</sup>

8. This parable, you see, teaches us that the "cure" for a "rebellious heart" is not punishment, justice, or even forgiveness.

A--Instead, it's the *Grace* of God -- unmerited favor given to *each of us* without condition.

1--It's Grace that symbolizes how God welcomes us back "home" with open arms, regardless of our wayward spirit and behavior!

2--It's Grace that lavishes us with unconditional love and generosity!

3--It's Grace that is greater than all of our shortcomings!

B--And THAT is reason to celebrate!

9. [PRAYER for people to receive the forgiving, generous, joy-filled grace of God by accepting the gift of His son Jesus...]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Definition is from Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries. The Hebrew term (#h2580) is *han*, from which comes the name "*Hannah*" - literally "child of grace." The Greek term (#g5485) is *charis*, from which comes our English words "*charisma*" and "*charismatic*" -- literally, someone who has "*gifts*" or is "*gifted*."

<sup>2</sup> So much so that "*grace*" and "*forgiveness*" are often used interchangeably -- as in... "*You need to offer that person grace...*" (meaning "forgiveness/mercy").

<sup>3</sup> And the two before it that involve a lost sheep (Verses 3-7) and a lost coin (Verses 8-10).

<sup>4</sup> "Tax collectors" were those who had taken jobs with the foreign government occupying Israel and made good money collecting taxes from their own people. "Sinners" were persons so designated because their offenses had gotten them thrown out of the synagogues. That Jesus ate with them is clear evidence of his acceptance of them.

<sup>5</sup> And it also means that we are called to offer this kind of grace to others, as well. In this story, the young son experience grace at least as *forgiving/merciful*, *generous*, and *joy-filled*. Each of these are qualities of grace that we are called to pass on, too. First, the father demonstrated **forgiveness/mercy** to the son -- who do you need to forgive today that you think doesn't deserve it? Second, the father was not only forgiving, but was **generous** and lavish in his love (demonstrated by the lavish gifts bestowed on the son upon his return) -- are you generous and lavish with your love for others, or do you put conditions on it? Finally, the father was **joy-filled** (demonstrated by his running to the son upon his return) -- when you relate to others (even those who've hurt you in the past), do you allow the "joy of The Lord" to fill your heart? or are you so filled with anger and bitterness that you have a hard time feeling joy?

<sup>6</sup> This was true because -- in the culture of that day and time -- one who gives another their ring is giving them the equivalent of what we today call a "power of attorney."

<sup>7</sup> While the younger son is often criticized for the various "sinful" things he does, the reality is that all these things are merely symptoms of a deeper sin: the "sin" of not wanting to be the child and brother he was created to be; his real "sin," in effect, was in rejecting his family. Well, God *our* Father created each of *us* to be His children, which means that (whether we like it or not), we're sisters and brothers to each other -- we're God's family. And so, anytime that by our words or actions we reject others who are not like us and try to live self-sufficient lives, then we're rejecting our own identity as a part of God's family.