

Luke 15:11-24 // The Hope of a Second Chance //

Graham Daniels

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[0 : 00] This evening's reading is found in Luke chapter 15. Please read along with me in the church Bibles on page 1048.

Luke chapter 15, beginning at verse 1 and 2, and then continuing on to verse 11. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

Verse 11, Jesus continued, there was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, father, give me my share of the estate.

So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

[1 : 22] He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have food to spare?

And here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants. So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

[2 : 29] Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate.

Thanks, Andy. Good evening. If you're a Christian this evening, you may just take for granted the chance to do this on a Sunday.

You know, put your phone off, get rid of everything, sit down and press reset and say, who am I again? What really runs my life?

What's it all about? If you've done it a lot, it's obvious to you, of course. But it's an amazing thing, isn't it? Not many people in the world get a chance to just stop and go, right, remember who I am again?

If you'd say, I'm not a Christian this evening, I'm thinking about it. It's the most beautiful thing, this, to stop and say, who runs the universe?

[3 : 34] Where do I fit? How do I know him? And how much does he love me? Church is a marvelous thing. And so when we did the confession at the beginning, every one of us, whether we have faith in Jesus Christ or not, we hear that and we think, gosh, if you do become a Christian or when you are a Christian, every day is a chance.

Just as we heard from Toby and Tom, they were so humble, weren't they? It wasn't about them at all, was it? It was about grace. Toby started by saying, grace, grace, grace.

And you could hear the gratitude in them, couldn't you? Both of them. Grace can never be separated from gratitude. So when you turn up at church like this, you say, whoa, if God loves me

this much, what a relief.

I'm so grateful that when I've made such a mess of this week so often, and I should know better because I've been a Christian for a while, that's what Tom said. But as he said it, I think to myself, well, he's spot on.

You think you're supposed to get better and you end up thinking, I'm getting worse here every week. But of course you're not. It's just you've always been like that, but you're more aware of it. And grace brings gratitude.

[4 : 53] So when we come to this story this evening, have a look at that on page 1048. We'll just walk through the story as we read it here.

I've called it, because you have to think of something to give you a kind of golden thread all the way through the story. I've called it the hope of a second chance. But as I stop commentating now and jump into the story, I want to say two things and then really jump into the story.

Number one, if you'd say, I'm actually not sure that I am a Christian this evening, well, I'll try and explain the Christian faith. And I'd want to say to you that this story is about a definitive second chance by turning and trusting in Christ.

A woman or a man has to make that step to turn to Christ and believe in him. It must be made to have a relationship with God.

And second of two, for those of us who would say, I am a Christian, multiple times through our lives, having made that first step the first time, the way we start is the way on.

[6 : 05] We're constantly, week on week, need to say, I'm coming back again. I'm coming back again. That's the confession. I'm coming back again. I'm coming back again. You keep opening your arms to me.

I keep making a mess and I'm coming back again. So I hope this can be an encouragement to you as you read the story today. Let's jump in then.

Here's the key to the story. Page 1048, chapter 15, verses 1 and 2. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

But the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them. So they're critical of him. Look, verse 1.

It's the outcasts of society, tax collectors and sinners, were the ones in that society considered to be collaborators with the Romans and sexually and socially immoral sinners.

[7 : 04] And the religious people had nothing to do with them. But lo and behold, of course, Jesus is hanging out with all the wasters. He's where the action is, where people really don't deserve anything.

That's who he hangs out with. And they're cross. Look at verse 2. The key religious leaders are cross with him. This man welcomes sinners.

He's so close to them, he even has dinner with them. Now, rather brilliantly, Jesus replies by telling three stories. But we'll go to the third story this evening, which is the one that Andy read to us.

And here's what Jesus did in the light of it. And we're about to read it again. He tells the story of somebody truly culturally awful. It's as if he says to his critics, you're not wrong.

You're not wrong I hang out with bad people. In fact, let me tell you a story about somebody who was so culturally inappropriate and so wicked, according to our culture, that no one should have touched him with a barge pole.

[8 : 13] And I'm going to tell you a story about this guy who was such a waster. And yet, he was welcomed back. And so he's going to exaggerate the critique against him.

Why? Because Jesus Christ offers hope for everybody. Everybody. It is impossible to be too many million miles away from God to be able to come home to him tonight.

If you've never come to him, you can never be too far away tonight to come. And as a Christian, if you know him personally, if you feel that you've been so far away this week that you dare not come back, then you're not understanding the gospel properly.

Because the heart of the Christian faith that it's all about his grace to you, he will never, ever, ever stop reaching out to those who turn their backs.

He will always draw us in. And that's what Jesus wants us to get here. As I prepped this, I thought, I was saying to myself, look up, Graham Daniels, all is not lost.

[9 : 29] It's never lost. There's always the possibility of a new start. Always, always, here and now, a new start. And if we take what Jesus says seriously in this story, we will walk out of here tonight.

Knowing, knowing, in our heads and our hearts that the God of the universe loves us. And what could be more precious a gift than that? Verse 11.

So here's the story he tells them. Jesus continued. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, father, give me my share of the estate. So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. When Jesus looks at these Pharisees and he looks at them and he says, in a shame culture, it's a shame culture.

It's different to Western culture. You do not embarrass your family. It's not about individual rights. It's about family. So when this man says to his dad, can you die?

[10:38] Because I want the money. That is the most wicked thing that Jesus could think of saying about a son to his father, to his opponents. There was this boy and he said to his dad, I wish you were dead because I want your will sorted.

Shocking behavior. Shocking to us. Shocking in their culture. But his dad lets him have it, you know. Look at verse 14. His dad lets him have it. He clearly does because, verse 14, after he'd spent everything, there was a severe famine in the whole country.

13 sets of claws. I don't need to explain it, isn't it? We're grown-ups. He got together. All he had, set off for a distant country, squandered his wealth in wild living.

I won't explain that, isn't it? He went on a riot. He went for it. All guns blazing. Party time. All these years, he thought, it's all right living with my own man.

[11:48] Yeah, my brother's okay. I'm desperate to get out of here and really live and find out the real meaning of life and be able to really go for what I think will excite me and make my life valuable.

And when he goes for it, verse 14, he finds out the hard truth. Whether it takes one week, one month, one year. Remember, we all know, don't we, that what we own, owns us.

I thought Toby was brilliant on medicine. That if you're bright enough and sharp enough and intelligent with people and emotionally intelligent enough to get things in life, when you get them, there comes a point when they start to slip like sand through your fingers.

You think you've found life. And when you think you've found it, it starts to own you because you've got to keep it up. You've got to keep it up. You've got to present yourself properly. You've got to keep winning. And it's exhausting.

Who can help now? When I've got the money in this man's case, I've got all the friends I want. Everybody's hanging out with me. I'm the guy to be with.

[12:57] What does he do when his achievements dissipate like hot sand through his fingers? Because this is what happens to him, 14. He spends it all.

And then there's a famine in the country and he begins to be in need. Horror story. He goes and hires himself out to a citizen of that distant country who sent him as a Jewish boy to the field to feed pigs.

That's a bad job. That's what Jesus is saying. That is a rubbish job. You're a Jewish boy. You don't eat pork. You're feeding pigs. He's hit rock bottom.

He was so hungry that he wanted to eat the pods, the food that the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything. It's a nightmare. Jesus is telling the story, right?

To the religious leaders. It's a nightmare. It wasn't meant to end like this. Now, it's a dramatic story and it's an extreme story.

[13:58] And he's making it to prove a point to his religious opponents. That he has arms open for everybody. That God, who is the father in this story, has his arms open for everybody. But perhaps an interruption here for our own lives.

Of course, it's unlikely, though one or two of us may say this of ourselves right now. And say, I'm like that boy. I am so far away from where I should be.

It is horrifying to me. I am in the most desperate situation. Now, you might be there because we can look fine. But just law of stats say that chances are, if one of us is in that extreme position, that would be a big deal tonight.

That would be a big number. No, no. Here's the thought. As we sit in this building this evening, is there anything in me that says, honestly, I'm playing away from home.

I'm not where I should be. In fact, I'm not sure where I am at all. I'm not sure what I'm going to do here. Because it all seems so promising. But actually, if you could really know about me, it's so hopeless at the moment.

[15:08] The job I thought that would be just satisfying. The family relationships even that I thought would be fulfilling. The reputation. The achievements. The job.

The possessions. Whatever variation it is. What you own does own you in the end. It'll capture you. We will worship and serve created things.

Not the creator. And there can't be one of us who's the odd one out on this. So often Christianity is portrayed as a sort of spiritual red bull.

You know, do a deal with Jesus. Become a Christian. Slug a bit of Jesus red bull now and again. And press on and be a top, top Christian. But if we think that's what Christianity is.

We're constantly embarrassed about ourselves because we think everybody else must be doing fine. And I'm a reject. And if I told the truth that actually I feel I'm wandering. I'm not quite sure where I stand here.

[16:10] I'm not quite sure I am with God. I seem to be chasing all kinds of things. I'm a terrible Christian. We're not going to tell anyone that. But if the truth about Christianity is that it's normative.

It's normative to be somebody who is constantly having to battle that ego in us. That wants to keep achieving and proving ourselves. And doing things that we know we don't want to do.

How can Christianity flourish if you become a Christian or are a Christian? How can it flourish if we can't break that?

We've got to break that. And that's what this story is about. The first thing the boy does, verse 17, is to come to his senses.

There it is. Can you see it? When he came to his senses. As if he's gone, right. That's, I have had enough. You know when you've had a belly full. Of the way you're behaving or living or the way it's going.

[17:07] And nobody really knows. You go, I've had enough of this. Lord, please, please help me. He says, I've had enough. How many of my father's hired servants of food to spare?

Here I am starving to death. It's one thing to be in a mess. It's another thing to face up to it. He looks in the mirror fairly and squarely.

And says, I'm feeding pigs for slaughter. And if you've never known yourself to be right with God. Or you know you have made yourself right with God through trusting in Christ.

For both parties, which would include everybody, I suspect then. By logic. At that point. Human beings are meant periodically, like the confession, to stand there and say, I'm going to stand in front of God.

Square on and look in the mirror and say, honestly and truthfully, I have sinned against you. And I need your help, Father. We've done that tonight.

[18:11] It's the first essential step to a new relationship with God. And it's always the key step to going on with God. Always telling the truth. Repenting.

Turning 180 degrees, literally. Saying, I'm walking the wrong way this week. I need to look at the cross of Christ again and again. I'm walking away. I need to look at Christ. What he's done for me. This is the Christian life as you come into it.

And it's the Christian life as you live it. And then there's gratitude, you see. And that's what this boy begins to do. He looks in the mirror and says, I'm in the wrong place.

I need to be with my Father. Which is God. I'm walking away. He knows only his Father can help him. This is where the Christian message is.

Fantastic. For creatures made by our Creator. There's only one who can really help me. It's my Father. And he wants me to come to the end of my own resources.

[19:13] It seems to me. That's why the story is so extreme. Look. Don't be pathetic. I'll use my own name. Don't be pathetic. Daniels. Stop clinging on to your own ability to make it as a Christian, you fool.

Stop it. Stop banking on yourself. Come to me. Come to me. This is life. Keep coming to me. I'm the one who loves you the most.

I'm the one who can save you. I'm the one who can walk with you. Stop depending on yourself. Stop wasting time. He says here.

There's only one to turn to. And it's almighty God. He is our strength. He is our hope. Even if you've been a Christian 50 years.

It's Christ alone who can be your hope this week. Not your own ability. That's the bottom line of this story. And now let's watch how he plans to do it.

[20 : 16] Oh, he's got a plan. If you've got a plan, you've got a chance in life. Do you think? And if you've got a plan, you've got a chance. Here's his plan. Verse 18. Verse 20.

So he got up and went to his father. So he's got a plan. And I imagine as he went home. Verse 20. As he walked home from the pigsty to his dad's house.

Can you imagine how many times he said that story to himself? Right. When you see him, keep calm. When you see him, keep calm. Say to him. Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you.

I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Give me a job. Any job. I'll do anything. I know I've run away from you. I know I embarrassed you. I shamed you. I will do anything because I need to eat, Dad.

And he's probably said it 5,000 times as he's walking home. With his stomach rumbling. And it's his last chance. It's his last chance.

[21 : 25] He'll die of starvation. If his dad doesn't give him any kind of job. Because his dad's wealthy. Now, here's the twist in the tale. Jesus is brilliant.

There's always a twist in the tale. Here comes the twist. Watch this. Watch what happens here. Verse 20. Second half.

While he was still a long way off. His father saw him. And ran to his son. I left out a middle clause. Ran to his son. Pretend for a minute the BBC are there.

On camera. And pretend we've got the angle of the boy walking up the road. Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy of you to call your son. Make me like one of your hired men.

Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. Make me like one of your hired men. Father, I've sinned. He's practicing. And then the producer goes, camera, change angle.

[22 : 21] Camera from the house. Camera from the house. Camera from the house. Watch the father. And then you see the boy in the distance and the father doing what no, no man would do if he was a wealthy man in that culture.

Lifting his dress up sort of thing. So he can run. Well, the whole reason that wealthy people wore big, long robes. And the workers in that culture wore short clothes.

Was that there was dignity in covering your body. Now at that moment when the camera captures the father pulling his skirt up and running. At that moment, I think you're meant to think, oh my word. He's going to kick him right up the backside and send him back. He's got to be. That boy has shamed his father. People in the village are watching him come back.

He's been a waster. He's been an embarrassment. His father, if he's got any class left, will peg it to that lad and go, get out of here.

[23 : 26] Get out of here. You're a disgrace to everything your family stands for. That's what should have happened to him. And the camera will capture it from that angle.

Now back to the boy. Because you see in second half of 20, his father saw him, was filled with compassion for him. Ran to his son.

Threw his arms around him and kissed him. Think God equals father. He threw it. And he's talking to, Jesus is talking to his religious opponents who say, what do you think you're doing?

Surely the only people who should have any relationship with the God of the universe is decent people. Proper nice people. Not the people you hang out with.

He says, do you want to bet? Let me tell you a story about this lad. He was an absolute rascal. And this is the story. Now at this point, we know the father does that. Watch the boy.

[24 : 26] He's brilliant. I mean, you may not have time to prep it up now. You may not think it's brilliant. But I think it's just magnificent this. Because here's the twist in the tale. The son said to the father.

Here he is. He's got his speech going, hasn't he? Verse 21. He practiced it. Father. His dad's like that. He's trying to speak. His dad's good. He's going, dad, dad. Father, father.

He couldn't get his speech out. He's worked hard at it. I have sinned against heaven. You see it there, look. 21. I have sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called

your son.

He can't get the next clause out. He can't say it. He doesn't say it. He doesn't say it. In verse 19, when he's practicing the speech, it says, make me like one of your hired servants.

Right? Here, he doesn't get to it. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. He can't finish his speech.

[25 : 27] His dad goes, quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. And he's probably thinking, oh, no, confusion. No, no, no. Any job will do. I don't deserve your love.

Why would you love me, dad? I've done my own thing. I didn't want you in my life. I set off from a wonderful home that you gave me.

And I just abused you by doing anything I wanted to on my own terms. You can't have me back. Look, let me earn my way back.

That's what people think Christianity is, isn't it? Let me earn my way back. Let me try and be a better woman this week. Let me try and be a nicer bloke this week.

And you know what God says to us because of Jesus Christ? God says, oh, shut up trying to say make me like one of your hired men, you fool. You can't do it.

[26 : 25] You'll never do it. It's always grace, you see. This is the liberation of the Christian. It's always him grabbing me. All the time.

Because he knows all about me. We're meant to see the overt nature of this boy's rebellion. Not many people see my covert rebellion, do they?

Or yours? But our father does. And he says, oi, come to me. Oh my gosh, is this a Christian?

The father said, quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. That's biblical evidence that you should wear sandals if you're a Christian.

Look, with socks. Look what happens here. Bring the best robe and put it on him. Do you see what he just did there in the beginning of 22? Rip off the old clothes.

[27 : 28] Get rid of the filthy clothes. No doubt, chuck him in a shower. He stinks. Put the nice clothes on him. I don't want any mark of the past on this boy.

The past is over. The future's begun. He's clean. And he's got new clothes. There's no filth.

It's a new beginning. And here's the wonder of the Christian message this Sunday evening. By the end of the Gospel of Luke, we know that Jesus Christ hangs on a cross outside of Jerusalem.

And as he hangs there, he's the only woman or man who ever lived in the universe who never was like this boy. He never, ever turned his back on his father.

He never in his heart turned his back on his father. And the story is meant to imply that almighty God, the father, sends his son to die on a cross so that every other daughter or son who's like this, because Jesus pays the penalty that they truly deserve for such wickedness against their heavenly father by taking all his life and resources and wonder and beauty and talents and saying, they're mine, see you later, politely, with the tip of the heart or aggressively.

[29 : 03] The whole message of the cross of Christ is that Jesus dies to pay what we owe for that rebellion. And when we turn to Christ and look at that cross, we can say, I'm coming back to my father because his arms are open.

Because he did it for me. Because justice and love met at the cross. What a privilege. What love.

What love this is. That you could be loved like this. Can I really be loved like this? Can the creator of 200 billion galaxies really love me?

Me? Me? Yes. That's the whole point of the whole thing. Come back to me and don't say, make me like one of your hired women.

Stop saying that. Stop saying I'll do my best bit to try and make up for what I did naughty. You're a fool. And that makes us all a fool, doesn't it?

[30 : 13] Because we default to it all the time. And that's why we can sometimes lack gratitude.

Because this grace brings ridiculous gratitude. And that's what the English Reformation, for example, in the 16th century, hung its hat on.

Grace and gratitude. They are never separate. If you understand grace, you'll be grateful. That's what happens in this story.

And it doesn't just look. Here's the last bit of the story. The past is clean. He's clean. It's gone. It's gone. He'll never be dirty again.

He's my boy. Christ paid. He paid for the filth and the pollution. It's all on Christ's shoulders. It can never be on you again. Forever. And the last couple of words are, Bring the calf and kill it.

Let's have a feast and celebrate. This son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. They began to celebrate. And just before that, the father says, Put a ring on his finger.

[31 : 21] Sandals on his feet. The boy is clean. There is no pollution in him. He's washed. The past is gone. The future is safe.

And it's so safe that the dad says, See my ring. See my signet ring. My family ring. Put it on him. Put my mark on him. Let everybody see in this village that they may think I'm a fool to welcome this boy back.

But you see, let them all see he's got the family ring on. This is my boy. This is my boy. And let everybody know it. And if they say, Well, I know him.

I mean, what a waster he's been. Or I work with her. She's got her weaknesses, you know. Oh, I know him pretty well. I mean, he's a nice fella, but he's got his flaws.

What do we say? We say, Well, make me like one of your hired men. I'll make sure I'm better than that. Or do we say, I know I've got a zillion flaws, but I've got this ring on. And this ring represents that God loves me.

[32 : 28] I'm his daughter. I'm his son. Oh, I'm a failure. I'm more of a failure than anyone at work. But I have a savior. I have a savior. And he just never goes away.

Every time I blow it, every time I screw it up, it hurts me so bad. I feel so bad. And then I have to remind myself that this is the human condition. But his love for me is so great, and his spirit is with me, that he will never, ever leave me, even in the darkest moments, as was eloquently articulated by Toby and Tom in their own way.

This is the Christian life. New status, new start, new life, new presence, new power. So how to conclude?

Christ offers hope for all. That's why, quotes, sinners are drawn to Jesus. That's why we're drawn to Jesus.

Look up. All is never lost. Every day there's hope. Every minute there's a possibility of a new start.

[33 : 47] Every minute, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The price is paid. The punishment dealt.

The clean judicial bill. Done. The presence of God in us. Guaranteed.

And a friend and companion and Lord and Savior through every moment of the ups and downs of life is the inheritance of the Christian that will take us to heaven. What a gift.

If you act on the recommendations of this story, you will walk out of this door tonight alive in your relationship with God.

If you'd say, I'm not a Christian. What can one do? Admit that I've dishonored God like this boy did. Face up to it.

[34 : 47] Take agency. And come to the one who's running down the drive to say, my cross paid for it all. Start again with me. If you're a Christian tonight, you've done this.

You know who your heavenly father is, but all the temptations of the universe say, yeah, but you screwed it up again. Ask God to make you like one of his higher daughters. Stop it. Come here, you.

He says, come here, you. You're mine. Now, come on. New start. Let's go again. I paid, you see. You can't work for me. It costs you nothing.

It costs him everything. Everything. Out of love. If we walk out with those truths in our mind tonight, we'll find like this son a real solid new beginning or ongoing life.

in this world this week. Well, let me close with a prayer. It's a much shorter version of the prayer of confession we had at the beginning.

[36 : 03] And I'll articulate it and I'll leave a bit of silence. There are three clauses to it with a top and tail. It's an ABC. But if in your heart of hearts you're praying this for the first time or maybe for the umpteenth time as you realize that Christ is always there to welcome us.

Here's the prayer. Dear Lord Jesus, I'll read it once. I admit that I have dishonored God. I believe you died and rose again to forgive people like me. I confess you as my Savior and Lord tonight.

So let me read that slowly before we close by singing together. Dear Lord Jesus, I admit that I have dishonored God.

I believe you died and rose again to forgive people like me. And I confess you as my Savior and Lord right now tonight.

Amen.