

Happy Father's Day men.

I did read this week where in one dictionary someone has noticed that the word "father" appears just before the word "fatigued" & just after the word "fathead." So to all you fatigued, fathead fathers, Happy Father's Day! We're really glad that you're here.

Seriously, happy Father's Day to each one of you!

This morning I want to spend some time in Luke 15 looking at the story commonly referred to as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. As you are turning there I want to set the tone for our time together by having us read **1 John 3:1** together as we stand:

Let's read together:

1 John 3:1 NKJV

'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God.'

Let's pray together: You may be seated.

1 John 3:1 the Message

'What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are.'

Today's message is titled **'What Marvelous Love'**

Please turn in your Bibles to **Luke 15:11-25**

I choose this parable of the prodigal son for Father's Day because it is a revelation of the heart of our Heavenly Father.

In verse 1-2 of Luke 15 the religious leaders are at it again, railing on Jesus as He spends time with 'sinners' who have drawn close to hear Him. They just can't seem to understand why Jesus keeps on keeping company with such a rag tag bunch of common sinful citizens. Listen:

Luke 15:1-2

Did you notice that the 'sinners' drew close to hear Jesus while the religious leaders simply found fault with Him? In fact verse 2 tells us Jesus 'received' or welcomed them and ate with them.

If you allow somebody to come between you and God, that might indicate they are actually closer to God than you!

Nonetheless, verse 3 says *'So Jesus spoke this parable to them saying...'*

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning; an example by which a doctrine or precept is illustrated. [Jeff E's new small group].

Jesus is using common everyday examples to illustrate His reasoning for hanging around sinners. He is trying to explain **'What Marvelous Love'** the Father has for us all, lost or found.

So Jesus speaks of the shepherd having 99 sheep and leaving them all behind to find the one that is lost; and Jesus tells of the woman with 10 coins who loses one and does everything she can to find it, and when she finds it she rejoices with all of her friends, but they still some prodding.

Just like the old Gin sue knife commercials **'but wait, there's more,'** Jesus has another 'earthly story with a heavenly meaning' to help make His point about spending time with sinners. This is our story this morning.

11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 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.

The first point might be easy to over look but it's very important:

1. The father's marvelous love provided for the son

Not only in a father/son relationship: *'the younger said to **his father...**'* but also with resources. The father had something to give.

1 Timothy 5:8 [DIVE daily Bible study: thanks Mike]

'But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.'

Marvelous love takes care of responsibilities and provides for the needs of those that have been entrusted into your care. A father provides for his son. He is there for him.

Jewish Law called for 1/3 of the inheritance to be given to the younger son with the remaining 2/3 given to the eldest at the father's death. [Deut. 21:17] However, a Jewish father could choose to abdicate his wealth prior to his death. This father did just that.

I have often read this passage and wondered **'what in the world was the father thinking,'** haven't you? **'Why would you do such a stupid thing?'** Especially when we read what the younger son does with his inheritance.

13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

[This leads us to the second point...]

2. The father's marvelous love released the son

This is a hard to grasp for I have also thought **'if only the father hadn't given him the inheritance the younger son wouldn't have done such a stupid thing!'**

I believe the son was going to do, with or without the inheritance, whatever he was going to do, regardless, even though the custom of that day was that children didn't pack up and leave their parents home; they added on to the estate and stayed and raised their family with the parents. I bet the father knew the heart of his son. He also knew the heart of our Heavenly Father!

*Releasing his son really meant relying on God's love to be more powerful than the earthly father's. God is in control dad and mom even when it doesn't seem like it. He does some of His best work when we 'stand down' and allow Him to have His own way. This isn't a license for parental recklessness but a lesson in God's sovereignty.

James Dobson: 'oftentimes we take way too much credit when our children turn out good or do the right thing, and way to much blame when they turn out bad or do the wrong thing.'

The inheritance wasn't the most important thing the father gave his son. The space and freedom to do either the right or the wrong thing, free will with a background in the truth, was a far greater incognito gift.

[It is apparent from this story that...]

3. The father's marvelous love taught truth to the son

Later, while attempting to exercise his newfound freedom, when the wayward son came to his senses he acknowledged that he had sinned against heaven and his father. The son knew what to do; he knew where to go; he had been instructed in the truth.

Proverbs 22:6 NLT

'Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.'

The father wasn't simply being careless and disregarding his parental responsibilities, giving him the cash and opening the door.

I have heard it said that God doesn't have any grandchildren, just children. Our kids can not ride into heaven on our coattails. They have to own truth not simply know truth just as we all do and sometimes as parents we make that extremely difficult for them to do because of our love for them.

4. The father's marvelous love trusted in the Lord

Because we have read the end of the story and know how things turn out it might be easy to agree that giving the inheritance to the younger son was wisdom though it didn't look to be so at the time.

Imagine what the father's friends might have been saying as they watched 'that old fool' walk to the bank and withdraw all his possessions and part them to his two sons. [verse 12 does say '*So he divided to them his livelihood.*']

Wisdom oftentimes seems to camouflage itself as foolishness and acts of trust can easily be misunderstood.

Proverbs 3:1-6

*1 My son, do not forget my law,
But let your heart keep my commands;
2 For length of days and long life
And peace they will add to you.
3 Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,*

*Write them on the tablet of your heart,
4 And so find favor and high esteem
In the sight of God and man.
5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.*

It is apparent the father had not forgotten God's law and was striving to let his heart keep His commands. Certainly this brought him great peace as he had mercy and truth inscribed on his heart and gave him favor with God and with man.

Therefore he found the grace to exercise profound trust in the Lord and fought the urge to rely on his own understanding. As he continuously sought to acknowledge his Heavenly Father he submitted to His direction for his life path which, in this parable, seemed to be parting out his goods to the boys, trusting that God would work it out.

Are you kidding me? How crazy a plan does that seem like? What foolishness!

Have you heard the phrase 'rumspringa' before? It is an Amish term which means 'running around.' According to my research assistant Mr. Wikipedia this term generally refers to a period of adolescence for members of the Amish religious denomination that begins around the age of sixteen and ends when a youth chooses baptism within the Amish church or instead leaves the community. The vast majorities choose baptism and remain in the church. Not all Amish use this term but in sects that do Amish elders generally view this time for courtship and finding a spouse.

What a tremendous risk these Amish parents and communities take in permitting their adolescents a rumspringa! The threat is that these children, once let loose, may never return; but that gamble must be chanced by the community because its members sense that the threat of not permitting the children a rumspringa is even greater. Absent a rumspringa process, there would be a higher probability of loss, of many more Amish youth succumbing to the lure of the forbidden, perhaps even after marriage and baptism, with resultant defections from the sect and havoc within it. The Amish count on the rumspringa process to inoculate youth against the strong pull of the forbidden by dosing them with the vaccine of a little worldly experience. Their gamble is also based on the notion that there is no firmer adhesive

bond to a faith and way of life than a bond freely chosen, in this case chosen after rumspringa and having sampled some of the available alternative ways of living.

Judged by practical results, rumspringa must be termed largely successful. According to studies done by Thomas J. Meyers, a sociology professor at Goshen College, more than 80 percent of Amish youth do eventually become Amish church members. In some areas, the "retention rate" exceeds 90 percent.

Understand this: I am not calling for such a practice by any stretch of the imagination whatsoever.

The Marvelous Love of our Heavenly father far outweighs our love.

Regardless of the father's trust in the Father can you imagine how painful it must have been to allow his son to go through such hardship? The story gets uglier but there is light at the end of the tunnel:

5. The father's marvelous love can be painful

14 but when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

Allowing the son to experience such hardship can be an excruciatingly painful and lengthy process. But there is good news:

6. The father's marvelous love always wins out

He had wasted all of his father's resources; it was all gone. He had spent it all and there was a famine and probably for the very first time in his life the younger son realized **'I have a need.'**

President Abraham Lincoln said 'oftentimes I am driven to my knees by the overwhelming knowledge that I have no other place to go!'

The process of realization of our need usually isn't a pretty picture and can be extremely painful not only for the participant but for the onlooker as well.

And then the miraculous occurs: he comes to himself and he returns to his father with a much different heart and mind set:

17 "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! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants. 20 And he arose and came to his father."'

He went from demanding his inheritance and spending it on wild living through the path of brokenness to being humbled and recognizing the error of his ways both with his father and with his Heavenly Father but not in that order.

It wasn't just his father's story now; it was his!

'I have sinned against heaven and before you...'

Isaiah 6:5 *'Woe is me for I am undone!*

He has the proper perspective and things are in order. It's not about his father and his possessions; it's about The Father and His marvelous love possessing him!

Let's look at how his father responds:

20 "but when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "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. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.'

Best robe, ring on his finger, sandals on his feet; party time!

'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

'What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are.'

Even when we don't look like it!

1. The father's marvelous love provided for the son
2. The father's marvelous love released the son
3. The father's marvelous love taught truth to the son
4. The father's marvelous love trusted in the Lord
5. The father's marvelous love can be painful
6. The father's marvelous love always wins out