

## **COURTEOUS GOODWILL**

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### **TEXT:**

“11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So, he divided his property between them. 13 “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. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. 17 “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! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ 20 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. 21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 “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. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. 25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ 28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ 31 “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” Luke 15: 11-32 NIV.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

This story that we all know so well is a perfect picture of GOD’s grace toward us, but, what does “Grace” mean? We translate it today as “courteous goodwill”.

In the Hebrew, “chen”, from the root word “Chanan”, means to bend or stop in kindness, as a superior to an inferior.

In the Greek, “Charis”, meaning favour.

John MacArthur defines it as “The free and benevolent influence of a holy God operating sovereignly in the lives of undeserving sinners.”

## THE WORD:

First let us look at this story as a father bestows rich mercy and lavish gifts (best cloak, ring, sandals & fattened calf) upon an undeserving son. (verses 22 & 23).

You will notice that the father does not give the son any old raggedy cloak, or even give him some nice cloak that is handy. The father sends someone to find and give him the BEST cloak he owns! This father gives him a ring to wear on his finger and shoes (sandals) for his feet. This father is making sure that this son has all he needs, and more!

This is a good and clear demonstration of what GOD does for us.

Ephesians 2: 4-10 says, “4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This shows GOD bestowing an extreme degree of love, forgiveness and mercy toward us sinners.

Next let’s look at how the father shows grace and compassion by receiving the son back into the family, restoring him to his former place, and not just giving him food to eat and a bed in which to sleep, but lavishing him with rich gifts and much love! (verse 24)

2 Timothy 1: 8 & 9 which says, “8 So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. 9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,” links in and calls us to be holy (set apart, entirely devoted).

2 Timothy 1: 9 tells us we have not earned GOD’s grace. It was given to us as a free gift!! So, for this reason we must be holy by coming to The Father, GOD, confessing our sins, and seeking to serve and honour HIM only!

The prodigal son demonstrates “becoming holy” to his father when he repents, saying to him that he recognizes he has done wrong, is not worthy of his father’s love, and will be grateful to be allowed to work as a servant for him. (verses 18 & 19)

Then jealousy enters the story when the faithful elder son is upset that the foolish prodigal son is getting all the attention and the prized fattened calf, while he has not received any recognition for his faithfulness and hard work over all the years. In fact, he was so busy taking care of the responsibilities that the father had given him that he did not even know his brother had returned until a servant told him about it. He refuses to partake in the celebration, and so his father had to leave the celebration to go out to him. (verses 29 & 30)

Now I want you to notice here in the text where the father justifies both the prodigal and the faithful elder son. (verses 31 & 32)

31 “My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

You see, he showed the elder son that he still was held in high favour by leaving the party to go out and speak to him and entreat him to join the celebration. He explained to the elder son that he still was the heir to all that the father had, and was not losing anything by showing such benevolence to his brother, and that the prodigal son had been as good as dead to them, but now he was restored to them (alive again), and so a celebration was quite fitting.

This is a demonstration of Romans 3: 21-26

“21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - 26 he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” Romans 3: 21-26

We are all God’s heirs in the eyes of Christ when we have repented and commit ourselves to HIM. It is a gift that we cannot earn. It is a gift given out of pure love. It is available to anyone who repents and gives their life to Christ. You cannot be too far from GOD. HE can always restore you.

Lastly let’s look at one of my favorite verses, Isaiah 30: 18

“Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!”

The story of the Prodigal Son demonstrates this verse so well.

First, it shows how “The Lord longs to be gracious”. You see the prodigal’s father was waiting and hoping for the return of his lost son. He was not too busy with his work, or his friends to stop always scanning the horizon for the approach of the prodigal. It tells us in verse 20, “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 father saw him when he was still a good distance from home, probably doubting and fearful of the greeting he would receive. I’m sure the prodigal was worried that his father would reject him, or at least express rage and anger over his careless behaviour.

Instead, the father embraced his son, not at arms-length, or with a pat on the back. The father did not send a servant to greet him. The father himself ran to his son. He did not walk, he RAN! He THREW his arms around him, likely in some great bear hug! And he kissed him! Can you imagine that embrace!

Then the father calls out, "Quick, kill the fattened calf, give him the best cloak, let's celebrate!" (verses 22 & 23) The father doesn't wait for the weekend, or the evening to come! The father doesn't wait for all the work to be done, or his business to be concluded. He can't wait to celebrate! He drops everything to receive the prodigal and celebrate his return!

Going back again to verse 20 notice again how the father saw him when he was still a good distance from home. The father did not wait for him to come and knock at the door. The father himself ran to meet his son. The father saw him "a long way off" either coming across the field or down the road, and he went out to meet him. The father did not leave the son wondering about whether or not he would be welcomed but went immediately out to greet him! The father demonstrated compassion (Isaiah 30: 18) He met him in the middle of the field or road! He warmly greets him and excitedly embraces him! He brings him home, all the while calling out orders to start a celebration!!

Notice verse 22 says, "Quick". There is urgency! There is excitement! There is unbridled joy! The father demonstrates "justice" (Isaiah 30: 18) as he accepts the prodigal's confession and proceeds to "graciously" (Isaiah 30: 18) restore him to his former place in the family.

The father gives to this prodigal what he does not deserve simply because he loves him.

This is the perfect picture of GOD!

I hear people all the time who complain that "God is some meany up in the sky waiting for you to mess up so that He can squash you!" I want you to know, you won't get some big anvil falling down to squash you when you repent! God is not some nasty judge waiting to pounce on you!

Here is what you need to tell people who feel that way. John 3:16 & 17 "16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

#### CONCLUSION:

Now everybody always quotes John 3: 16, but I think that verse 17 ("For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.") is far more important for people to hear.

God is not some judge waiting to squash you! GOD sent Christ into the world to SAVE it, to SAVE US! Christ did not come to condemn us, but to save us, to restore us!!!

Imagine the hug the prodigal son received! Just imagine that embrace! The prodigal did not know what kind of reception he would receive, but he was welcomed, forgiven, loved and restored! His father was not angry and vindictive! His father was elated and showed grace, love and mercy!

That is a picture of GOD! We know what kind of reception GOD is waiting to give us. HE is waiting for us to come to our senses, repent and come to HIM! HE will receive us with open arms. The open arms of Christ on the cross! The joy of salvation can be yours today!

Look at the world today. If you do something nice for someone, they start to wonder what you want from them, or what you have done against them! There is fear and suspicion. Try doing something nice for someone who is mean to you and see what sort of reaction you get, but this is a way to witness to the world. Don't seek revenge. Don't try to get even. You will get much farther if you model Christ and exercise mercy and compassion!

The world thinks that you get what you deserve, but we see the grace of GOD as a gift freely given to anyone who will receive it! Start sharing that gift. Live with compassion and mercy!

Remember how the father ran out and hugged that prodigal son. Remind yourself of the grace and compassion of Christ!

Keep the vision of that hug. That hug is GOD to you!