

“The Love of God for You” // Luke 15:11–32 // Easter 2013

Happy Easter, Summit Church! How many of you prefer the hollow bunny at Easter? The solid? You know if you get the hollow bunny that means the person who gave it to you doesn't really love you. I actually prefer the hollow bunny.

Early church: Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Summit members ALL OVER THE WORLD: Hindi; Dari; Turkish; Mandarin; Arabic; Indonesian; Swahili; Russian; French; German; Portuguese; Swedish; and Spanish.

This is, I believe, the most important day on the Christian calendar, and it addresses one of the most widespread myths about Christianity in our culture. It's really natural for people to want to divorce the moral teachings of Jesus from his supernatural life.

- People are like, “Jesus is awesome. He forgave adulterers—that is so nice. He was against big religion and the Roman Empire and he stuck up for the poor. Go Jesus. Sermon on the Mount? Brings tears to my eyes.”
- But then when you get to the part about him rising from dead, being the Savior for those who call him Lord. Well, not so sure about that.

But here's the problem with that. The Apostle Paul said that if the resurrection is not true than everything else that Christianity teaches is worthless. You say, “Well, that's Paul's opinion. I just accept the parts of Christianity about God being love and how we should love and forgive and reject the rest.”

OK, but where did you learn that God is love and we should forgive each other?

- For example: everybody loves 1 Cor 13 read in their weddings. “Love is patient; love is kind.” Guess who wrote that? Paul did. That was not a common view of relationships at the time. In Paul's day it was not love and forgiveness that were important but honor and retribution. And Paul said, “If the resurrection didn't happen, 1 Cor 13 is useless. So if you don't believe in the resurrection quit reading that at your wedding.”
- “God is love.” Where'd you learn that? “From my grandma.” Where'd she get it? Probably 1 John 4:18. Again, this was not a common belief in the ancient world—that God's defining characteristic was love. The Apostle John who said that God is love also said that anyone who denies the resurrection of Jesus is a liar and false prophet.

Do you see the dilemma? *Everything you appreciate about Jesus came from people who believed that he rose from the dead*, and who said that if the resurrection is not true everything is false.

So in light of that I want to share with you a story that Jesus told a group of people. It's one of the most famous short stories in the world—Charles Dickens called it “the finest short story ever written.” But I **don't want you to hear it as a quaint** story. I want you to hear it as truth. This is a story that Jesus told that summarized his life, a life whose defining moment was the death and resurrection.

It's the story of the prodigal son.

At the end of my message, I am going to offer you a chance to respond and trust Christ as your Savior for yourself, if you never have.

And we have a tradition at Easter where we baptize a lot of people—we've got a lot of people ready, and we offer you a chance to be baptized, on the spot, if you never have.

- You say, "Well, why would I do that?" Jesus said that baptism was the public declaration that you believe in the cross and resurrection and are identifying with it as your hope of salvation.
- It is supposed to happen after you make a personal decision to trust and follow Christ.
- You say, "Well, I was baptized as an infant." That's great, but whose faith was that a symbol of? Your parents' faith. Baptism is supposed to be a symbol of your faith.
- You say, "Well, I'm not prepared to go home wet." As I'll explain: We have everything you'll need: **clothes, towels, hair dryers—deodorant.**
- You say, "Well, my family is not here and I want them to see it." We have a team of great photographers on hand, and, in addition, all your friends have iPhones and they'll record it for you.
- So, that's how we're going to end today.

OK, so here's the story—again, not a quaint story but the summation of Jesus' life; a life defined by the cross and resurrection.

("The story of the prodigal son")

Luke 15 if you have a Bible. This story is commonly called "the story of the prodigal son." There are **3 main characters**: you have a younger son (he's **usually referred to as 'the prodigal'**); you've got an older son—he has a very important role in the story; the father.

A couple of things people usually get wrong about the story.

- **First, they think the main character is the runaway son.** But the main character is the father. He's mentioned no less than **12x** in a span of 20 verses.
- **Second, we think that the word "prodigal" means "runaway."** But the word "prodigal" in English means "reckless" or "wasteful." It means to spend until you have nothing left.
 - The word "prodigal" appears only one time in the story as a reference to the son blowing all his money.
 - And, I'm going to show that when you see the bigger point in the story, the word prodigal probably better applies to the father than the son, because the story is about the recklessness of God's love.
 - So as I tell you this story I'm going to highlight the love of God being spoken about through this parable.¹

11 Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.'

- He wants his dad's money, but he no longer wants him. It's hard to imagine anything more painful for a dad. His son is saying, "*My preference would be for you just to die so I can have your money, but since that isn't happening, I just want to take the stuff and go away.*"
 - I can't imagine anything more painful that I would experience than for my kids to one day say to me, "*We have no desire for a relationship with you. We don't want to be around you. We don't want our kids to know you. Just give us your money and get out of our lives.*" Nothing in my life would cause me more pain.

¹ Throughout this message I draw upon many years of hearing this story taught, but the focus on the love of God I owe to a message given by David Jeremiah at the Pastor's Conference, 1st Baptist Jacksonville, FL, 2013.

- Jesus is giving us a picture of what sin is like, something all of us have participated in to some level. We don't really want God in our lives. We don't want his control. His rules. We don't value or need his love.
- Around our house we call sin the big "I" problem. Middle letter of the word. I want to be in charge. I want to be in control. I want to be the point. People think of sin as heinously moral acts, and it includes that, but its essence is that I want to be my own Lord.
- And that can't happen when God is around, so I'll just ignore God. For all practical purposes, God is dead to me.

Now, comes the first major surprise in the story: **13 And he divided his property between them.**

- The book of Leviticus says that you could have a rebellious son like that executed.
- NT scholar Kenneth Bailey says, "*First century Jewish custom dictated that if a Jewish boy (rejected the family) the community would break a large pot in front of him and cry out, so-and-so is cut off from his people!*" This ceremony was called the *kezazah*—literally the 'cutting off'—and after it was performed the community would have nothing to do with this wayward person."

Here's our 1st point:

1. God loves you even when you rejected him and broke his heart.

Before you repented; before you wanted to come back to him; God set his love on you. He never stopped loving you.

13 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 in reckless (prodigal) living.

14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

2. God loves you as you wander in the darkness.

This guy's free life started great.

- He went to the far country—away from the father, away from the rules—and got everything a lot of money could buy.

But then the winds changed. The money was gone. Then the friends were gone. And there was loneliness. Begging. Despair. The journey ends with him taking the lowest job in Israel—feeding pigs—which were considered unclean animals—so hungry that he craves the filthy slop they eat.

Which gives you a picture of the trajectory of sin. It usually starts great.

- Did you know the Bible says "there is pleasure in sin"? It irritates me when pastors imply there is not. I can remember pastors saying when I was a kid, "*Sin ain't fun.*" I'm like, "Well, then you ain't doing it right."
- But there is a 2nd part to that verse. The Bible says, "There is pleasure in sin 'for a season.'" It begins fun; but it ends in darkness.

Some of you are there:

- **Maybe it's the darkness and pain of sexual sin.** When people have some deep wound they want to talk about with me it almost always involved sexual sin. Someone **you did something with**; you may not even know their name—or a string of somebodies. Or maybe **somebody who is no longer** around even after they promised you they would be.
- Maybe you're in a pigsty of broken relationships.
- Or you've lost your family. Or you're in debt.
- **Or the darkness of a secret sin you've never confessed—that is eating you alive.**
- The path you chose promised so much, but it hasn't led where it promised.
 - **Angelina Jolie** says she remembered one of the most upsetting times in her life was after she had finally achieved success, financial stability and she was in love. She said, "I have everything they say you are supposed to have to be happy but I am not really happy."
 - **Eminem** said, "You have to be careful what you wish for. *I always wished for this but it has become more a nightmare than a dream.*"

Maybe that's where you are this morning. In the far country. **God loves you during all of this.**

- You see, you should think of this story as if you were watching a **split screen**. On one side of the son in his reckless living.
- On the other is the never stopping, never giving up love of the father. When you are reading this story you tend to forget about him, but you can't because throughout this whole journey he's watching, waiting, never ceasing to love his boy.²

17 "But when he came to himself,

- When he finally woke up.

...he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."**20** And he arose and came to his father. **But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion,**

3. God loves you as he brings you back.

- Let me point out something you may not notice. It looks like the son is the one who is deciding to come back. But this is the 3rd story in row that Jesus in row about finding something lost.
 - The first was about a lost coin—a woman had 10 coins, and she lost one somewhere in her house. She didn't rejoice that she still had 9; she scoured the house—swept; pulled up cushions, until she found it.
 - Then he tells a story about a lost sheep. A guy had 100 sheep, and one was lost. Didn't rejoice in the 99, he went after the lost 1.
 - Those increased in value, so the person gets more desperate.
 - You may not connect with either of those—a coin, sheep. You know what it's like to lose **\$20 in your wallet**. You search through all your pants. \$20 will not break you but you want to find it. How about when you lose your **credit card**. You know that feeling of panic when you can't find your credit card? You're not content with the other 6 you have in your wallet. You have to find the 1 that is lost.

² Throughout this message I draw upon many years of hearing this story taught, but the focus on the love of God I owe to a message given by David Jeremiah at the Pastor's Conference, 1st Baptist Jacksonville, FL, 2013.

- But **the climax of Jesus' trilogy** is the last one, the story of the lost son. If you are anxious to find lost money or a lost sheep, you're desperate to find a lost child.
 - *Lost K in Target...*
 - **This is the desperation God feels for the one that is lost.** And he seeks.
- And you **don't see it illustrated** as much in this story, but just like in the other stories, the father is the one seeking.
- The **Apostle John** explains that we come to the Father as he draws us.
 - He arranges the circumstances of your life to draw you to himself, and he's working through all kinds of things in your life.
 - Pain: A broken marriage or a failed career: something you thought was secure is falling apart.
 - Maybe you have started to look at your family—your kids are getting older.
 - The scare of death. Some of you have had a health scare recently. That is God drawing you.
- **I'm not a prophet**, but I know that for many of you that's exactly what he's been doing even leading up to this weekend.
 - Listen: it is not an accident that you are here.
 - You may have **felt like it was a random invitation** from a friend; or you saw one of the Summit Church stickers on the back of a car and you thought, "I'll try there."
- Lewis in *the Chronicles of Narnia*: a boy is running away but throughout the journey he hears footsteps. An **occasional roar** in the distance. Lewis uses that to explain how God pursued him.
 - Lewis said, *"He was whispering to me in my pleasures, telling me there was something more. Or the desperate feeling I had in my pain."*³

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran...

- Grown men in those days did not run.
 - **Even in our day** grown men don't usually just run, unless it's for a sport.
 - If you see a grown man running through the mall, it's either because he's committed a crime, or because someone is trying to commit a crime against him.
- Men of stature in those days wore robes. Not good for running. No one enters a marathon with a full, ankle-length robe.
 - Lift up the front and expose his knees, something considered shameful.
 - There comes a time when an emotion so dominates your heart that you forget everything.
 - Iconic photo of Jimmy Valvano... He looks like he's lost his mind. Jimmy, you look crazy! I don't care! We won the national tournament.
 - You're shaming yourself: I don't care! I have my son back.

...and embraced him and kissed him.

4. God loves you as he wraps you in his arms

- Have you had this moment? When suddenly in your spirit God's voice whispers to you the tenderness of his love, telling you that though you've run away he's never given up.
- **My wife** had wandered away from God during her high school years. She had just about cast everything off her freshman year of college when she was invited by a friend to go on a Christian ministry retreat. She went reluctantly because a group of her friends were going, but she tried to tune

³ My paraphrase, from *The Problem of Pain*.

out the speakers as much as possible. At the end of the one of the talks, the subject of which she cannot remember, the speaker asked the attenders to pair up and pray for one another. My wife said that the girl that prayed with her, a girl whom she had never met, began to pray as if she knew exactly what was going on in her life. She called out, in prayer, Veronica's fears, questions, and sins. She then prayed the love of God into her life. Veronica said **she felt completely exposed**, and she knew that God was confronting her, revealing her brokenness, and speaking his love into her. **She was completely undone**. God had demonstrated he knew her every secret and loved her anyway.

- **If you stop to listen, God is telling you that now, through this story.**

21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 But the father said to his servants,

- BTW, did you notice that he never got through his prepared speech? He'd planned to tell his dad about his plan to become a servant and work off his debt... But his dad cuts him off, and says to the servants...

~~22 But the father said to his servants,~~ 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

5. God loves you as he baptizes you with grace and makes all things new

- He gives him 3 gifts:
 - Robe—the best robe would have belonged to the father. He is being clothed in the garments of the father.
 - Ring—symbol of authority.
 - Sandals—sign of wealth. Servants didn't wear shoes in the house. Only sons did.
- The son has requested the status of servant; he's been denied—he's been restored as a son.
 - Our natural reaction when we know we've sinned against God is to try and work it off. But God will have none of it. You can't know God that way.
 - You have to know God on the basis of **grace**.
- **Where is the shame** from what the son did? It's gone. The only one who experiences any shame in this story is the father as he runs for the son.
- **Where is the punishment?** There's not a drop of it.
- **Who pays** for his reckless living? Not the son. The father absorbs it.
 - Instead of shame and beating and humiliation there are robes and honors and parties.

The sweetest, richest word in all Christianity, the one people find hardest to believe, is "**grace**."

So let me now explain why this whole story is really about Jesus' death and resurrection.

The cross was Jesus running after us, taking upon himself our shame.

- He was beaten, spat upon. Cat of 9 tails. Nails in his hands and feet.
- It was so painful men would weep, vomit, urinate all over themselves.
- The Romans would crucify them naked in a public place, like at a mall.
- This was Jesus bearing your sin and shame.
 - Do you understand what the cross is? **It's Jesus taking the place for your rebellion and wayward living.**

- The cross for many people in our culture is just a **decoration**—a symbol of their faith. But the cross is everything. It's God bringing you back. **The cross is not a decoration; it is a declaration.**
- It's a **declaration that though you and I deserve condemnation**, Jesus took it all in our place and offers us the restored intimacy of sonship if we choose to receive it.

The resurrection was Jesus making all things new.

- It is where Jesus took the **garments of our sin** and put them away in the grave and clothed us in the **robe of his righteousness**;
- Where he gave us the ring of a new life—authority to overcome sin and corruption; authority and ability to put your family back together, to escape the curse over your life and make all things new.
- He put on our feet the sandals of our privileged position with the Father so that we can come boldly **into his presence** like sons.
 - I've told you my kids have an access to me that no one else has...

If the cross and resurrection are not true, then this just a quaint story with no real meaning. But if they are true, then it means God is the true prodigal—the one who spent until he had nothing left. Who ran to you. Who gave it all up for you and now offers to clothe you in power and grace.

If the cross and resurrection actually happened, it means that there are none of us who are beyond the reach of God's grace.

- **No sin** is too wicked; **no country** too far; **no recklessness** too severe; **no shame** too great; **no corruption** too advanced and **no pigsty** too filthy. He is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God through him.

If the cross and resurrection are true, your history does not have to determine your identity or your destiny. Your future is not defined by your past mistakes but by the promises of God. A God who makes all things new and clothes you with power.

If the cross and resurrection are true, there is nothing you could do that would make God love you more; nothing you have done that makes him love you less. It's a gift you simply receive.

GRACE: God's riches at Christ's Expense. You get the position of the son because Jesus, God's perfect son, paid the price of your rebellion.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'

28 But he was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and entreated him, **29** but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' **31** And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. **32** It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

6. God loves you when you're too proud to receive his grace.

- This brother, on the surface, looks like the opposite of the younger son. He's good and upright. But subtle detail: he's outside the house.
- Jesus has a very specific person in mind in telling this part of the story. The religious person—who has lived a good life and thinks that God owes them because of that, but has never experienced God's grace and has no relationship with God.
 - This brother is not like his father at all. He hates his brother. **He may be near the house of his father, but he doesn't have the heart of his father.**
- Do you ever notice that religious people can be some of the most unloving people on the planet? They are self-righteous; many of them are haters. Some of you have been victims of that.
- That's because religion cleans you up on the outside without changing you on the inside.
 - If you have kids, you know that one of the most interesting parts of trying to raise them is the potty training stage. No kids? Just wait! It's the weirdest time in your life.
 - You applaud for **poop**. Sometimes I get outside of myself and imagine doing that for anyone else. If I did that with the people that work with me or for me. They come get me and show me what they did in the toilet and I'm like, "Yaaaay!"
 - My first son is 3, so we're in a new stage. **Sink the cheerio**. Don't know what that is? Just wait.
 - The other thing that goes on during this time is that they like to do things by themselves, and the two don't always go together.
 - My 2nd daughter, when she was 4, disappeared to the bathroom for a long time. Now, if you're a guy and you go into the bathroom for a long time, that's not a problem. Guys can spend 6 hours in a bathroom; read through back issues of Motor Trends magazine and put together a small lawn mower while they are in there. But if a 4 year old girl disappears for a long time, that's a problem.
 - Eventually, our friend Stacy hears crying come from the bathroom and she goes in and about gags... because there is Allie is standing there, beside the toilet, with poop EVERYWHERE. Arms. Face. On the sink. Stacy said, "I don't understand how poop got on her face.
 - And Allie is crying saying, "I tried to clean myself up!"
 - That's what religion is.
 - It usually just leaves you in a worse state. I know that's nasty, and I'm not trying to gross you out, but that's what your heart is like. PAUSE.
 - It's cleaning up the exterior without changing the heart.
 - **Isa 54:6**: Religion: like filthy rags
 - Religion doesn't actually change the heart. Leads only to pride and more filthiness.
- What God wants is to change of the heart. And that can't happen by you resolving to do better. It happens when you experience God's grace and he makes you more like him.
- The grace of God for you is what creates the new heart: makes you like the father.

But here's the good news. **God loves you during that time when you're too proud to receive his grace.**

- Sometimes we have a hard time seeing this. We believe God loves the wayward sinner, but he also loves the lost religious person.
- According to Jesus two people miss the gospel: wayward and self-righteous.

Which leads me to our last point:

7. You can choose to stay outside of God's love forever.

- The story never resolves. It ends, abruptly, in verse 32. Does the older son receive his father's invitation and come back in, or does he stay outside? It doesn't say, because the story is itself an invitation. Will you receive God's offer of pardon?
- God won't force it on you. You have to choose to receive it.

Here's my question: have you had the very simple experience of receiving Christ into your life?

- But I'm religious!
- Maybe you know **Christian hypocrites**. Yes, I am angry at them. Jesus didn't say follow my people, Jesus said follow me.
- Maybe you just know a bunch of people who are Christians and **they are weird**. Let me help out the home team here. Newsflash: Those people were weird before they became Christians. Now they are just saved weird people. And that is good news for all you weird people. God loves weird people too—but the weirdness is not because of their Christianity. The weirdness is just them.
- The offer is between you and the father who created you.

I want you to have the chance to receive Christ if you never have, and so I'm going to extend that to you in moment, and I also want to give you a chance to be baptized as a show of your faith in Christ, if you never have done that.

Now, I want to be clear: baptism is not the same thing as receiving Christ, but it is the symbol that you've made the decision.

- Explain:
 - Not that water cleanses you—we use Durham city tap water, so you're actually dirtier when you come out than when you went in!
 - *"That's weird."*
- You say, **"I am already serious about my faith.** Why would I need to go through that? What's **the big deal?**" It's a big deal because it's a command of Jesus. Who are we to decide which of Jesus' commands we want to marginalize?
- And I know you have lots of excuses popping up in your head. Any excuse you'll come up with, I promise we'll have an answer for:
 - I rode with people (they'll wait, I promise.) If you drove, raise your hand. **If you are unwilling to wait, leave it up...**
 - **No clothes?**
 - We have t-shirts from sizes **small** to **XXL**, shorts with drawstrings, and even **coverings for your head** in case you're really proud of your Easter hair.
 - We have **hair dryers** – you get those when you get out of the water for liability reasons. We have **hair gel and hair spray** so you can redo your hair. We have **combs and brushes and deodorant**. And if you need more stuff than that, you're vain and too high maintenance, and Jesus forgives that too.
- You say, **"I was baptized as a baby"**
 - Scripture always presents baptism is supposed to be a confession of your faith. Every single baptism we see in the NT, every one, happened to an adult. It was a profession of their faith.
 - If you were baptized as a baby, whose faith was that a symbol of? Theirs. You need to make one of your own.
- **"I'm not ready to switch denominations."**
 - I'm not sure what that means. I'm not asking you to switch denominations. **You don't ever get baptized in the name of a denomination.** You get baptized in the name of Jesus. Not "in name of the F, S, HS, and SBC." We are not going to baptize you as a Baptist, or a Presbyterian, or as a Catholic, but as a follower of Jesus.

So, some of you need to come, talk with one of our prayer team, trust Christ today, and then show it through baptism. ***Others of you in here have already trusted Christ*** (at a previous time), but you've never taken the step of being Scripturally baptized! Today is your day. It's time for you to take that step.

Bow your heads

- (salvation prayer... "I receive your love and offer of salvation. I believe in the resurrection; and that means that you are Lord and you are in charge. You call the shots.)
- If you've never been baptized, tell God that if he'll give you the courage, you're ready to take that step now. If you have been baptized, and you're with somebody who you think needs to, pray for them right now...

Worship teams getting in place **(AND BEGIN PLAYING IMMEDIATELY)**. When I stand you, you will come.
ALL STAND.

Bullpen:

Maybe you're not quite there yet:

- Maybe you've never learned the difference between happiness and joy
- Something falls apart. You lie on a hospital gurney...
 -
 - GRACE: God's Riches at Christ's Expense
 - God giving you what you don't deserve because of Christ.
- Instead of the punishment that you do deserve, you get embrace that you do not. Instead of a future filled with the curse, you walk in blessing.
- Here are two statements about the gospel that are almost impossible to believe:
 - "In Christ, there is nothing you can do that would make God love you more, and nothing you can do that would make him love you less."
 - "In Christ, your history does not determine your identity or your destiny."
-
- We think we have to work our way back to God. We apply to be his servant. You'll never know God that way. God restores you in grace.
- GRACE: God's Riches At Christ Expense.
 - Gospel: "There is nothing you can do that would make God love you more, and nothing you can do that would make him love you less."
- And he makes all things new. Isn't this guy supposed to be broke? In debt? Now he's wearing robes, and a ring and sandals.
 - I have good news for you: In Christ, your history does not determine your identity or your destiny.
 - Your future is not determined by your past mistakes but by the promises of God.

Weird Christians

- There is nothing I can ever do to make God love me more, and nothing I can ever do to make him love me less.

about how he was going to work to make it up to his dad? You can never work your way back to God. Salvation is a gift of grace that God gives to you.

- He knows his son will face shame when he comes back to the village, so he took the shame upon himself and humiliation on himself and rushes out to rescue his son from what he ultimately deserves.
- And then he covers him with honor!

The symbol of becoming a Christian is baptism. Explain baptism: death and resurrection. Not just washing. We don't Purell your hands. Comb your hair. You get wet, which is really inconvenient. A symbol that your whole life is changing. You are redefining your life in light of the death and resurrection!

- Our tradition is to baptize people at Easter.
- Which we're going to do today. You don't have clothes. We have them.

In light of that, I want to tell you a story—one of the most famous that Jesus ever told.c

It's not proximity; it's relationship. Corey staying in my house, if he snuggled up to me like one of my kids.

Prodigal son

- Who the characters are:
- The point: God loves you when... you've run away
- God loves you when you reject him
 - What the son said: It'd be best for me if you were dead. As a dad of 4, I can't imagine anything more painful
- God loves you when you are in the dark
- Sins that keep us in the dark:
 - Sexual sin. Someone you did something with; you may not know their name; they are no longer around; you thought they were going to be.
 - Secret sin
- In Christ, your history does not determine your identity or your destiny. Your future is not determined by your past mistakes but by the promise of God.
- God loves you as he's bringing you back
 - God ran. Grown men even in our day don't run for things. if you see a grown man run, it's because he's committed a crime, or because someone is trying to do something bad to him.
- God loves you when you resist his grace
 - This brother represents the religious guy:
 - If you have kids, you know that one of the most interesting parts of trying to raise them is the potty training period. No kids, just wait. You applaud for poop. Imagine doing that with anyone else: your boss. Yaaaaay!!! Sink the cheerio.
 - My 5 year old goes into the bathroom and she's gone for a long time. Now, for a kid, that's never good. If you're a guy and you go into the bathroom for a long time, that's not a problem. Guys can spend 6 hours in a bathroom; read through 6 back issues of Motor Trends magazine and put together a small lawn mower while they are in there. If girls go it's got to be in a group. If she's in there alone, especially at that age, that's a bad sign. The babysitter goes in and there is poop everywhere. And Allie is like, "Look, I cleaned myself up!"
 - That's what religion is.
 - Religion: like filthy rags
 - Doesn't actually change the heart. Leads only to pride and more filthiness.
 - Story of Allie trying to get herself clean

This is it! This is everything.

- Early church greeting: Christ is risen/ Christ is risen indeed
- Celebrated communion
- Changed day of week of worship

Joke: Some of you don't want to be here: heard a convo that took place between a man and wife. She was getting ready, thought he was... she came out and said, "Why aren't you ready? We need to go." I don't want to go for 3 reasons: "nobody is friendly to me; everyone is suspicious of me; I just don't like it." She said, "first, that's not true. Some people are friendly. #2. The suspicion is mainly in your head. #3. You're the pastor. You have to go." That was my wife and I this morning.

Prodigal Son:

- Andy Stanley: how you act when you lose a credit card. You forget the 6 other you have and go after the 1. See *Deep and Wide*, 350.
- Prodigal refers to reckless

- The prodigal son is not an exception to the other 3 parables as in the others talk about God seeking and this one talks about us seeking him...?
- God loves you when...