

## Sermon -- The Prodigal Father

By: Thomas Ackerman

Dear brethren, I want to deliver a message to you tonight about the fathers in our Church and our nation. It's a message I've been nurturing inside for a couple of years and longed to preach here. You know when you speak about family and about fathers, there is often a world of hurt and sadness involved, because so much sin has imploded our families, so much sin has hurt our children. I'll tell you this; what I have to deliver tonight may make you weep, and that's alright. It may make me weep too. That's alright. We can all weep together. It says in the Bible that Jesus wept. And He didn't weep because He was weak. He wept because He was strong. He was strong enough to love humanity and to love God and pour out His soul for us, and that's why He wept. His strength. So feel free to do the same. You might want to hold onto your seats too. Or better yet, hold onto the Ghost. Hold onto the Ghost real close.

These days you might have to advertise that your sermon on the family is going to be a Hallmark card message, because there is so much pain, people wouldn't want to hear it otherwise. They'd want pre-written notice that it's going to be a Hallmark card sermon, or they're not going to come. But this one isn't. I don't see anywhere in the Bible where it says we need to speak like a Hallmark card does, so if you want to leave that is your choice, but I hope you don't. And to tell you a little about Hallmark cards anyway, they make cards which celebrate sodomy and homosexual marriages, so do we really need sermons sounding like them? I don't ever buy Hallmark cards for that very reason. And I hope if anyone here is in the card-making business you never ever use the cards to promote moral evil. So my sermon tonight is going to be NOT like Hallmark cards in more ways than one.

So hang onto your Ghost.

Let me begin by telling you this. When I was a much younger man, and I did whatever my wicked heart desired, I used to know a young woman. This young woman had an interesting habit. Whenever you were driving down the road, especially if it was a big road, the kind the big trucks drive on, she'd look out the window whenever a truck passed buy. She'd look up into that truck window. So I asked this young woman – why do you always look up at all the trucks

on the road? And she asked me – Do you really want to hear the truth? I said – yes. And she told me -- I'm looking at the trucks to see if it's my daddy is in there. You see he left us when I was really little, and I still remember what he looks like. We don't know where he even lives anymore but I know he drives a truck. That's what she told me. So every single time I pass a truck on the road, she said, I always look up to see if it's him. That's what she said. She was looking for her dad.

Now this is a true story, by the way. I don't make this up. In fact it's so true it could be told a million different ways by a million different people. But yes, this really happened. And statistically speaking, she had a real possibility of seeing her dad one day. Even if he never walked in the door at home. There are only so many thousands of truckers on the road. Eventually, if she kept up that habit for years, there's a real chance she'd look up out the window and see his face, and she'd know it was him. She's maybe wave up at him in his cab, and they'd finally have a chance to meet after all those years, and embrace, and be like a father and daughter ought to be. Statistically speaking she stands a chance. She keeps looking up out that window, at every truck that goes by.

Now that's not so uncommon a situation is it? In this era it is almost normal. Well, it is normal. Either because the dad's left on his own or been forced out. I'm talking mostly about the former situation tonight. So you might just want to call this message – the Prodigal Father. The Prodigal Father. And I don't want to make it sound like I'm getting all down on the men, because we know women disrupt and destroy families too, but this is Father's Day and this is the message that's been on my heart, so it's mostly about the men. What do we really think about the prodigal father?

I take that term from the Bible. From a passage most people know very well, of the Prodigal Son. Or you might say – the Lost Son. This is the Son who is not satisfied to live in his father's home, under his father's authority, but demands his share of the goods and leaves. Wasting the goods, and living in misery, the lost son, you might even say the dead son, finally longs to return to his father's house. He even thinks it would be better to return as a servant than as a son. Anything would be better. And seeing his son on his way back home, the father comes out to meet him, he doesn't even wait for him to come all the way, but graciously comes to meet his son.

The father doesn't rub it in, either. He doesn't rub it in the prodigal's face, nor does he make his return as a lesser person; rather he fully restores him as a son. This is a powerful story about redemption of sinners in Christ. It is also a story that's been told many times in every era, through rebellious children who leave their home to waste it all, but later are restored. It is a spiritual Gospel message. It's also incredibly tangible, and real life to us all. And we love to hear about the prodigal son. It reminds us our own restoration in the Savior, of our own returning to Him of Christ's incredibly gracious love, not just to restore us, but to restore us with joy and celebration, fully and completely as a son. God forgives, AND He forgets. We also love the story because of all the close-to-home ones it reminds us of. Of the people we really know who came coming home to the father. Of families restored. Love restored. Hope for those who are still out there in the cold. It warms our heart, doesn't it?

But I'm going to tell you that the same love you feel in hearing about the lost son is the same love you ought to share also, when it is the lost father. Or when it's your father. Or your husband. Who is truly repentant, and on his way home. If for a second you have desired the forgiveness of God in your life, in the same way you must be willing to forgive that lost dad. You must treat him the same way you'd want to be treated. You must be willing to restore him the same way you have been restored by your heavenly Father.

Some of the reasons that the prodigal father leaves, are the same reasons as the son; sadly, for hedonism, and riotous living. Other times it's for perceived independence. Other times it's because he thinks he's unhappy, and he can find more happiness elsewhere, so he goes and looks for that happiness, despite the sin of leaving his family. He tries to find it elsewhere. Man's motivations aren't always that complex. And some of the same sins attract people from age to age. Isn't that true? And adults fall prey to some of the same temptations as youth. The prodigal father is in many ways like the lost son, but he's not the same. He's a father. He has the role of father. He has the position of father. He left not just his family but his kingship. The king has stepped down.

I don't want to talk too much about the reasons many fathers leave, some are just messed up in crime and drugs and the leaving almost happens organically out of that stew of destruction that sin can become. I want to focus more on what we do when the prodigal father is heading home. You know the worst of criminals was given a conscience by God. They were given a knowledge of what the family is and should be by God. The lost father, who once was dead, but now lives, knows that there is no price you can pay to have the love of your children. The sincere love. He

knows there is no amount of raw pleasure that will ever make a child's anger toward you feel any better, no amount of pleasure seeking will make children you've walked out on and who hate you, seem much better. They know that a family and children are priceless. They know crime is wrong. They just didn't care enough. They know cruelty is wrong, they just followed their feelings anyway, followed anger or violence. So at some point when the height of pleasure dies down, they begin to see the absolute treasure they have thrown away. Just as the lost son did. The lost father knows he would gladly return outside of his rightful position just to know the love of the family, than to live any longer like an animal and in filth. He knows it would be better to return and sleep on the floor, at least to know a look of joy in his child's eyes.

I hope there is no one in the Church that Jesus Christ founded, who would turn away the prodigal father. I hope the same sheep who think with tears in their eyes how the Father actually searched them out and loved them enough to go looking for them, that when the prodigal dad returns they show the same love back to him. When we see those first steps home, we come out and run to him. For if we desire God to forgive our sins, so too, must we forgive others. That means accepting him back. That means if he is sincerely repentant, we forgive. We don't merely say we forgive, but we forgive in reality: with a restored relationship, and with honor and respect and love.

I hope no one in the Church founded by the One who spoke from the cross – Father forgive them for they know not what they do – aren't thinking to themselves – sure he can come back, but only if he grovels. But only if he does this or does that for me. But only if proves it to me over and over again. Because that's not how the father restored his son in Jesus' parable. Are we willing to do the same? Has God made us the kind of new creature which will do the same? Do we say -- *'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: <sup>23</sup> And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: <sup>24</sup> For this my FATHER was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'*

And it must be very hard in this case, perhaps harder than toward the lost son, to be willing to restore that relationship. Because the father has a position, one of respect and authority, one that he has likely abused and tarnished. Yet if anything in our heart says – my father cannot be restore to his true position – we still have bitterness and unforgiveness. Because forgiveness includes restored relationship. The Father in Luke 15 did not restore his son merely as a servant, as the boy had asked, but as his beloved son. If our prodigal father comes home, forgiveness

means a restored father. His restored position. Restored respect, and authority. It is not halfway. It is not restoration to being some guy who lives here. It is restoration to being a father: to full honor, and as in Jesus' parable, with joy, with merriment, with abundance. Would we desire anything less for ourselves?

Jesus taught this in **Matthew 18**: *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.*

<sup>24</sup> *And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.*

<sup>25</sup> *But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.*

<sup>26</sup> *The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

<sup>27</sup> *Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*

<sup>28</sup> *But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.*

<sup>29</sup> *And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

<sup>30</sup> *And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.*

<sup>31</sup> *So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.*

<sup>32</sup> *Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:*

<sup>33</sup> *Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?*

<sup>34</sup> *And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

<sup>35</sup> *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

So shall my heavenly Father do also unto you.

I think about my friend, who was always looking out that car window. If her dad comes back one day, if he pulls up in his truck, I mean really comes back to be a father and love her and protect her and asks forgiveness, I don't think for a second she will say – No, pay me what you owe me first! What about all that you owe me? No. I think that young woman will be joyful. There will be tears in her eyes. She will forgive. Even if she's an old woman when he finally comes back. She will forgive.

So what I'm saying today is that we have to be willing to receive our fathers back. We have to do it in a real and sincere way. We should make them feel welcome. Wanted. Longed for. We should go out to meet them even as they approach in a distance. We should always be looking out there for them on the horizon, if they are not in the home. And we should not forgive them halfway. We forgive them fully. As we are in Christ. This One who did not just grudgingly cancel our debts, no, but rather: *hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*<sup>7</sup> *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.* He showed us a superabundant love, and overflowing mercy. He lifted us up together with Him. The glory that the saved child of God knows is greater than Adam before he fell from grace, Christ brings us higher than where we fell from in the first place. So too should we do in our forgiving love, toward our prodigal father.

*it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

<sup>10</sup> *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

(1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

Eye has not seen the great riches that God gives to those who love Him. So deep are the riches He shares with His lost children.

*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*

*<sup>8</sup> And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*

(Revelation 19:7-8)

Isn't forgiveness amazing?

There really are other reasons why children won't see their fathers this year. It's not only because of those who have left or who still have dangerous criminal careers. Many children will not see their fathers because of unforgiving mothers, who do all they can to prevent restoration of the home, and poison their children's minds against their dads. No one has a right to take children away from a parent like that. A woman who does those things is now the one in need of restoration. She is the one who needs to get down on her knees and humbly repent. Maybe the guilt was originally on him, now it's on her; if we separate children from a parent we sin.

God created man and wife to be together. He did not create them to be alone. And he did not create step-dad to join with single mom. Those things have happened because of human evil and error, but God did not purpose the family that way. God did not purpose solitary mothers either. He did not purpose a mere father figure. He made man and wife. There are TWO parents. Mother and father. They are to love and care for their offspring for life. Both of them. This is both God's order and nature's order. It is a child's right then to have both a father and a mother, the modern claims of our secular society notwithstanding.

A woman who refuses to forgive, according to our Lord Jesus, will not be forgiven herself. And if she is refusing a lost husband and father who seeks restoration, she acts on a prideful, wicked and unforgiving heart. And you can dress it up all you like. She probably has a million reasons why she thinks he's no good. But dress it up all you like, it's still unforgiveness and pride. A woman who keeps a father away from his children is nothing but wicked.

[You see our Creator did not establish human society built upon women and small children. No. He did not build the foundation of civilization which is the family to be made up of the weaker

sex and small children. He built it upon man and woman for life. I know a woman right now who's having to learn to do a few of the heavier things around the house. That's because her husband has left her and her three children to be with a harlot, so now she's doing what she has to do to get by. And that's what many women and children do. Just try and get by. But God did not purpose that. He made the backbone of human society the man and the wife and their children.

In doing so you know He gave a little picture of His own blessed and holy nature. He gave a picture of His personal nature. An illustration of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who love each other eternally. What a gift He has provided us. For like the Trinity, the man and wife know a mutual love that is binding together, and like the Trinity that love produces more life, the children by whom the parents are known. We will be known by our children, brothers. And by our fruits. This is the ultimate model of human relationships – the family – which is also the picture of God.]

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I want to return to my friend now, because I've talked for a while about fathers who return, or at least who might return. But for all those people looking out the window on the road, just trying to catch a look at their dads, there are many who will never see them come home. Maybe even never see their face again. What do you do, if you are looking up, and looking up, and you never see that face in the window? What does God will you to do with that situation? He might never come. We have to face that.

What God wills you to do with that situation, is that the person you are looking for in the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of that day – is to BE that person yourself. It is His will that you BE the faithful, loving, protecting father you wanted to look up to. That person is going to have to be you.

And you say – why does it have to be me? And I say – why did it have to be Abel being cut down? Why did it have to be righteous Noah to build a boat? Why did it have to be the prophets, to be cast out, persecuted, killed for their faith? Why did it have to be the Savior at the cross? God has a better plan for you. God's plan for you is better than for anyone else.

You say – but no, my lot in life is lower, I've got no dad. You're wrong. God has greater plans for you. Your situation is better. Just let him take you in His hands.



People often wonder how God can be sovereign over evil. But the Bible says that the Christ was crucified from the foundation of the world. God's hand was on that event from before this earth ever was, God's hand held there. It pre-ordained that event. And through the most evil event one could imagine, the crucifixion of the God-man, he saved countless souls from the horror of hell and He lifted them up in heavenly places to sit with Him together. He prepared them mansions in heavenly places.

So I suggest, that whatever principle God uses to ordain the crucifixion and save souls eternally could be the same one He used to place you in your situation right now, without a father. Because He is going to use that in glorious ways, if you allow Him to be your heavenly father.

He is going to have to be it. That is a blessing. There are millions of Christians that take for granted the fatherly strength and care and love of our God, they have so much, they do not rely upon the Father enough, they rely on themselves. You have been given a blessing. The one to know Him so completely, and turn and give yourself to Him so completely, and turn and receive His love so completely because you're not consumed with doing those things through other people. You're not consumed with any worldly version of it. Turn to Him. He is your Father now, and you have to be to others the one that you wanted to have.

You will say to me – but that's not really what I want. What I really want is my real dad, and for him to roll down that window and wave at me, and I want him to come home. But I'll tell you. If you give yourself to your heavenly Father He will open up the windows of heaven and rain down so much grace people will be jealous by the real joy they see that you have. They will want to know what on earth makes you tick and what makes you so happy and full of love for the world. But you let Him take you in His hands.

So if your father never came home, you were not given something less than everyone else. You were given something more. Something better. Orthodox Christians call the day a man was murdered – Good Friday. They call it Good Friday not because murder is good. They call it good because they know the victory that God brought from it. You do not have something less. You have more.

And when you go on to get married, you will be the one to be faithful, to love your wife and your children, and you share the Word of God with them. Someone will call you dad, with love in their eyes. Not heartache and loss. You will lead them, teach them and you will have

merriment together. You will be the one to be strong. To teach them justice and right. You will show them how much you love humanity, as Christ does, and how much you love the heavenly Father. You pour out your soul for them.

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You know there's a scene from the historical drama – *Doctor Zhivago*. It's about the times during the Russian Revolution. I remember a scene where the characters are travelling through war-torn Russia, in the winter. They come upon a barren place where a village has been recently destroyed. A few survivors are running out of the cold. A woman huddled over runs out of the night to them and stares them in the eye with a wild stare and says – soldiers. Trying to figure out the situation they ask the woman – were they red soldiers (meaning communists) or were they white soldiers (meaning nationalists)? Were they red soldiers or were they white soldiers? She just stares at them with the same wild eyes and says – soldiers.

This world is beset with cruelty and injustice, with all kinds of pain, and insult and death. More than the mind can imagine sometimes. And if you're willing to forget for a second about the wrong someone did to you, that's your chance to provide justice for someone else. And if you want to be a good father, even if you never had one, you do the same thing for others. You take them from the cold. You protect them. You feed them. You show them you honor and respect their humanity. That you would work together for a common cause, or simply sing together or laugh together. You battle evil. You seek righteousness in the world around us. You want to manifest the heart of Christ that He gave you. To reveal it. For there are all kinds of evils in the world. But there is absolutely no way on earth, to put out that perfect eternal light. There is no night so dark, it can put out His light. It shines on in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Do not think to yourself, anyone, that you can use your bad home or your absent father as an excuse for doing evil. It can never be so. There were men in ancient Israel who lost their father at a young age, and God held them to His commandments, to lead righteous lives and not to break the law. Do not think you can abuse drugs, or fornicate, or practice violence, robbery or any wickedness and then blame it on a bad daddy. You must do righteousness like everyone else, and seek justice, and maybe you should have an even greater understanding of its importance because of what your eyes have seen and your heart known. Perhaps you should know better, and not worse. Because -- I had a bad daddy -- will not work on judgment day. Not

for a second. I had a bad daddy -- won't work before the criminal justice system if they drag you in for breaking the law and it will not work before Almighty God.

And I can tell you that Almighty God is outraged at the evil done by men in this country, no matter how many excuses they think they have. He is outraged by the mockery of God, by the lewdness, by the materialism, by the perversion, by the divorce, by the drugs and by the never-ending heartless trail of cold blooded murder. Our God is justly angry at man's violence, and do not think some weak excuse will change that. We will be justly judged. We all must obey the Lord, whether your daddy came home or not.

As you might have read before, perhaps the men with the worst father imaginable in the Bible, actually wrote part of the Bible itself. Those are the sons of a man named Korah. Korah was the assistant to Moses who tried to defy Moses' authority and take over control of Israel. He started a rebellion that had many Jewish leaders and ordinary people supporting it. It could have destroyed national Israel shortly after its birth. This wicked man Korah was miraculously struck down by God, being swallowed up by the earth, along with his men. He was wicked, and he died, and was never there for his children after that.

Yet if you open the book of Psalms you will see his own sons recording hymns of worship that come down to us today, that God used as clean and righteous vessels to communicate His truth. Psalm 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87, and 88. They're by the sons of Korah. God does not communicate His truth through the reprobate. He communicates His truth through the righteous. These men had all the reason in the world to excuse themselves for sin, yet they were righteous men, and they wrote the verses of the Holy Bible. You are NO LESS righteous than they...if you are faithful. If you are faithful.

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Finally, I want to say that God is good, brethren. He can do no injustice. None. God is good. The Lord spoke through the prophet Ezekiel to the people of Israel and He said: *Yet ye say, The way of the LORD is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?*

You see, God is good. He is saying – you claim I am not fair, but it is YOU who are not fair. And after all brethren it is man who does injustice over and over, and not God. We can complain all we like about our life situation, but no one forced us to do evil. Just as national Israel was held to account for its wickedness, so will we. It is not God who is unfair. It's us.

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I ask you today to practice forgiveness toward absent fathers, and welcome them to return. Not to hang onto bitterness from a year ago. Or twenty years ago. Even to practice the same forgiveness and graciousness that we see in the Bible toward the prodigal son. Moreover, if we as a people return to faithfulness to God, turning away from our own prodigal rebellion, I am hopeful at His grace in restoring the Church as well as our nation. Don't we all know our Church and nation must return too? Yet I cannot help from reminding us of the ubiquitous costs if we do not; those costs are of more destroyed families, lost children and lost fathers, of godlessness, of immorality of violence and death. It is a battle also for our eternal souls, every single one of which is made in the image of God and hangs in the balance.

The book of Malachi ends, promising us of the Messianic age –

*And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*

Malachi 4:6

I believe we've seen at least a portion of that curse around us in this nation, and the harm done by separating the fathers from their children, the fathers' hearts from their sons' hearts. It is a curse upon the earth.

We ought to cry out with psalmist's words -- *Horror hath taken hold upon me – horror hath taken hold upon me -- because of the wicked that forsake thy law.*

Psalms 119:53

Yet the prophet Micah teaches us brethren how simple it is to live within God's way:

*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

Micah 6:8

Finally, the Holy Spirit through Paul speaks of the redemption, the reconciliation, which is only possible through the life-blood of Jesus Christ, proclaiming:

***henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.***

***<sup>17</sup> Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.***

2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Behold, brethren, all things are become new.