

## 4) Arrogance is Crushed by God's Grace

Luke 15:11-32 • 2022-03-27 • Lent series "Crushed"



It can be really crushing when someone makes you feel unwelcome. It hurts even more when you feel you don't belong because you earned ostracism. This happens with small things, like when someone is told they're not good enough to belong to the sports team or the school theater. It's not just losing the game; it's being cut from the team. When we fail, do wrong, and know we can't belong—that really hurts. Some of the hardest words to swallow are, "It's too late," or "You had your chance." What about when it comes to those who feel cut off from their Father in heaven and from their spiritual family because of their sin? Have you ever felt the pain of the thought, "I blew it" as you contemplate your relationship with God? Many have! This morning we consider Jesus' response when some people are made to feel unwelcome in God's family. Jesus teaches us what sort of welcome God wants everyone to feel in our Christian homes, in our church home, and with him.

The Bible scholars of the day, the scribes, and the Pharisees, noted Jesus hanging out with sinful people. They were the people well-known for stealing, committing adultery, and prostitution, perhaps some were known for drinking too much wine. They all carried the label "sinner" as far as religious society was concerned. Today this label might fall on those on probation, those caught with illegal substances, those with a drinking problem, and those who would probably never consider themselves welcome at most churches. But there was something different with this group of sinners. They wanted to be with Jesus. They didn't just want to hang out with him. And they weren't looking for another drinking buddy in Jesus. They were with Jesus because they wanted to hear his Word, "they were gathering around Jesus to listen to him."

When the religious leaders told Jesus that he shouldn't be welcoming those sinners, you can imagine they might have felt crushed. So, Jesus told a story to help them understand the love of the Father for all his children.

There were two sons. And the younger son said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the inheritance." I'm sure this would hit any father hard. The only value he sees in his father is the riches he can get. Isn't that what sin does? It reduces God to a mere dispenser of riches. The father then concedes. What does the son then do? He went abroad to a foreign land to squander it with wild living. This is a trademark of sin. We try to separate ourselves from God.

The son could break all the rules in a land that didn't care about what he did. It only cared that he kept paying. The terrible irony of sin is that it bases all of our worth and value on what we have, what we own, and what we can do with our bodies and possessions. The world looks at you and me, and it puts a dollar sign on our forehead and on our bodies. And it says in a way that ought to make us shudder, "You are worth this much." And the price put on us is how much our hands can put out, or our wallets pour out, or our bodies sell out. And we are prodded into selling ourselves out because we believe the lie that it will bring us greater joy.

But what happens? The younger son spent all his worth. Now what was he worth? The sinful land that loved his money made him feel worthless without it. He hired himself out to work for someone in the land. He received one of the jobs most never would envy: feeding pigs. And he was so hungry he longed to eat the food he fed to the swine. But no one gave him any food. The trap and lies of sin are real. It promises joy. But its pleasures don't last. He had gone from being a treasured son in his Father's house to being a slave in a far-off land, from well fed to hungry, from honored to shamefully overlooked, from loved and with his family to unwanted and alone.

When we sin, we don't always end up in the pigsty. But the ultimate end of sin is this: we separate ourselves from our loving Father in heaven. Could you see yourself left wondering, "Does God still want me? What place do I deserve with others?" Ever felt the pain of the thought, "I blew it." The son began to feel it hard. "He came to himself." The foolishness of sin became apparent as he recalled the home of his father. "How foolish I've been! Aren't even the servants in my father's house more well fed!" All sinners eventually will feel the pain of what their sin has brought into their lives. Broken families. Broken hearts. And worst of all feeling outside the loving embrace of their God and Father.

But he recalls his father's love. He still calls him, "my father." When we fall into sin, leave God, and turn to other things it doesn't change this truth. "He's my Father." The devil gives us courage to sin. And it leaves us in lasting pain and ends up in separation from God forever—separation which we deserve. But the love of the Father gives us another courage: courage to confess.

The son now had his plan. Repent. "I will go back to my Father, and I will say to him, 'Father I've sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" Repentance isn't merely being sad that you fell or hurt yourself or others. It is grief over what we have done against God. Like David confessed after having an affair and committing murder, "against you Lord, I have sinned." And repentance isn't coming like a spoiled child saying, "You have to forgive me." No. It is admitting, "I'm no longer worthy to be called your son." It is recognizing we justly deserve nothing good for our wrong. And finally, it includes trusting in him as our merciful Father. Repentance comes with the trust he is still, in grace, "my Father."

His courage to confess wasn't misplaced. While he was still a long way off, the father saw him. Can't you just picture the father looking constantly! Can't you picture the heartache that filled him when he saw his son leave down that same road? He wanted to see his son again! When he saw him, the father ran to him. And he didn't scorn him. It says that he fell upon his son and began to kiss his neck and embrace him. Picture how the son had nothing on his feet. His garments reeked of swine. He had nothing of possession to call his own. He only had these words, "Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you..." That confession was met with rejoicing!

The son isn't made to earn his way back or pay back his debt. Before the son can continue his confession his father interrupts, "Quick," he says to the servants, "Put the best garment on him! Give this son some clean clothes! Put a ring on his finger! Give him something that shows him he is treasured and loved! Put sandals on his feet! Give him what he needs all he needs! Shower him with love and blessing!" And instead of having people murmur he declares, "Kill the fattened calf and let's celebrate!" Why? "This son of mine was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found!"

Jesus could have ended his story right here and you would still have one of the most beautiful pictures of forgiveness in all of the Bible. The devil's lies give us the courage to sin. The Father's love gives us courage to confess. The lies of the tempter lead sinners to never feel welcomed or valuable –but worthless and only valued by what they can spend. The Father welcomes us home and makes us feel loved and treasured by him!

You and I stand forgiven like this son. It doesn't matter how badly you've spurned the Father. He longs to receive and forgive. The sinner who comes to him in repentance is freely received back. His great love gives us the courage to confess our sins. We know we can call on our Father and he will have mercy. And we know that our Father in heaven will not leave us in shame but welcomes us with joy! He treasures us and rejoices that we have repented and turned to him. This is what it is for you, me, and for everyone who calls on the Father through Jesus.

And we can be certain that this forgiveness is for us and all because Jesus came to welcome sinners. He received them and ate with them. Why were they drawn to him? Because this message of the Father's great love which he shared. And he came to bring us that great love by covering our sin. The Father lost far more than just his estate because of our sins. He gave up his Son to die for our sins. And he came to give us his righteous robe. Instead of tattered stinking garments of sin he placed his righteousness on us. We've all been washed with Christ and in baptism clothed with him. He's given us the seal of the Holy Spirit as a deposit and sure sign of his love for us. He has poured out his gifts and invites us to join in his eternal feast in heaven. And as sure as Jesus lives, we are now part of the household of God.

But how far will you go in sharing the Father's love for the lost? Jesus' story continues to help us see that the Father's love is not just for us, but for our brother! The older son hears the celebration as he comes in from working in the fields. The older brother is the one who did everything right. He stayed. He did everything he was supposed to. He knew his younger brother had wasted his possessions in sinful living. The older son refused to join the celebration.

The Father had to come outside and urge him to join them. The older son then listed his grievances. "All these years I've been slaving for you..." Wait?! "Slaving?" Is that what he considered his work for his father? Why doesn't he call him father instead of inferring he is a harsh slave driver? "I've never broken any of your commands" Never?! He surely thinks too highly of himself! "But you never gave me even so much as a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends!" Now he charges that his father wasn't loving toward him! Now he makes it clear that like his brother, he thinks celebrating and spending wealth is all that life is really about. "Now this son of yours..." Wait?! Notice how the older brother refuses to call him "my brother." He speaks in contempt for his father and brother. He refuses to welcome his brother back. Why? "This son of yours who has squandered your wealth with prostitutes... you kill the fattened calf!" He only values his father and his brother off of what they are worth and what they spend. See what the devil has done?

Here is the real problem. There will be times you might view yourself as the son who strayed –which we all must confess we have done – or you view yourself as the son who stayed –which we could all at times begin to join. Either way when we don't feel the love of the Father for the lost, we miss out. The Father wants all his children to know his great love. How terrible it is when someone can't feel welcomed by the Father because there the church has someone who wants to sit outside and grumble that the sinner can't belong. The pregnant teenager. The young man who was sexually immoral. The person longing to break the addiction and shame that comes with it. The man who let his family down because he abused his wife or family. The man who gambled away all his family's possessions at the casino. The man who fell into an adulterous affair and cheated on his wife. Can you, would you rejoice at them repenting? What qualification does Jesus put on them feeling welcomed and worth his time and the honor of eating with their Lord? "They came near to listen to Jesus" That's it.

It was the love of the Father that gave them the courage to draw near. It was the love of the Father for the lost that made them feel welcomed and feel joy. And it is the love of the Father that pleads with his church when it turns into the bitter, self-righteous, crusty brother, "You are mine. All I have is yours! This brother of yours was lost but now is found, was dead but is alive! We have to celebrate!" And so may we as God's grace crushes all arrogance.