

Sermon #1538
Title: His Heart
Text: Luke 15:11-32

Gary L. Johnson
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Series: All Eyes on Jesus

INTRODUCTION → Welcome to The Creek.

What a great time of year this is! Literally millions of Americans are following what's happening in the **FINAL FOUR**. It may be that your favored team has lost and is out of the competition, or it may be that your favored team is playing in the championship game tomorrow night. The NCAA is not the only organization experiencing a **FINAL FOUR**, but we are. Here at The Creek, it's my privilege to be preaching my **FINAL FOUR** messages as the preacher of The Creek.

This brief, four-week series is called **All Eyes on Jesus**, for He alone is the famous-one who captures our attention and devotion.

Luke 9:51

As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

To be “taken up to heaven” (i.e., meaning His ascension), Jesus would first die on a cross, be buried in a tomb, and be raised from the dead. Then He would be taken up to heaven. This one verse means that Jesus began His last—His final—journey to Jerusalem. With **all eyes on Jesus**, we cannot help but notice four things: His high-calling, His heart, His humility, and His hope.

Last week, while Jesus walked to His final steps to Jerusalem, He arrived in Jericho where He saw a man who was literally *out on a limb*. Remember that guy's name? Zacchaeus. That particular stop on the road to Jerusalem reminded us of the **high-calling** of Jesus; that He came here on a mission to “seek and to save the lost” – which includes every one of us. Jesus taught us that everything in life is secondary to that singular truth. Every person has an eternity, and where we spend eternity is determined by who Jesus is to each and every one of us. If we surrender our lives to Him and trust in His death on a cross for our sins, our eternity is guaranteed to be in heaven with God. Yet, if we reject Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, our eternity is guaranteed to be in hell apart from God.

Luke 13:22

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.

This week, we're going to listen in on a story that Jesus told. It's a story about a family and it reveals to us the **heart** of Jesus. Staying in the gospel of Luke, turn with me please to chapter 15, and please be sure to listen carefully to the story that Jesus told that day.

Airport security is serious business, not only here, but in airports around the world. Coming home from a mission trip, Leah and I were going through security at the airport in Vienna,

Austria. My carry-on went through the x-ray machine first, and after walking through the metal-detector, I was waved on to go into a glass-enclosed boarding area for the flight. Leah was right behind me—or so I thought. I turned and looked through the glass and I could hear the guard’s heavy German accent say to Leah that there was a problem—a big problem. She gave me one of those panicked looks—and I could do nothing as a panel of glass separated us. The officer asked Leah to step to the side as they ran her carry-on through x-ray again. By now, three officers were looking at the computer screen—pointing accusingly at something. They asked her, “Why do you have a knife in your suitcase?” If you know Leah, she took one of her very defiant postures—that would be hands fixed firmly on hips, and she declared, “I don’t have a knife in my suitcase.” Now remember, I’m watching all of this unfold before my very eyes through a floor to ceiling glass panel and I can’t help my wife. She mouthed the words, “They say I have a knife!” **GASP!** I couldn’t believe it! Leah was packing a knife. The three officers dug into the carry-on to a hidden inner compartment—and sure enough—out came a knife! Now we had two very different reactions. I could HEAR Leah through the glass say to the officers—very firmly, “I did NOT put that knife in my carry-on!” And as she turned to look at me, I went, “**GASP!** Now that’s where I put my knife!” Regretfully, I no longer have that knife, but I still have my wife. Those Austrian officials did not take her into custody. They would have had their hands full had they done so. Even though I still miss that knife, I still have my wife. She finally forgave me. Took a while. But she forgave me. This week, we will hear a story that Jesus told and as He told it, there would have been one **GASP** after another from the crowd.

Before we begin reading the story, think about **heart health**. Let’s keep **heart health** in the forefront of our thinking. According to the Centers for Disease Control, heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women. One in four Americans die of heart-related causes. Regretfully, medical science has revealed that heart disease can be hereditary. Generation after generation can be prone to struggle with heart disease, even leading to death. But the good news is that progress is being made. From 1950 to the year 2000, deaths caused by heart disease dropped by 60%, and progress continues to be made as some people are eating healthier and exercise regularly (canwivelbetter.bayer.com). Keep **the heart** in mind as we move through the story.

This is one of the most powerful and personal parables of the many parables that Jesus told. Remember, Jesus loved telling stories and Luke recorded more of the parables than any of the other three gospel writers. Jesus told many stories, and each of them had a major point. This parable was no different. For centuries, people referred to this story as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but there was much more to the story that Jesus wanted the people to hear that day – and on *this day*.

Luke 15:11-13

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...”

As Jesus told this story, “tax collectors and sinners had gathered around Him” (see verse 1), and also listening in were “Pharisees and teachers of the Law.” As they listened, there would have been one **GASP** after another as Jesus told the story.

GASP – The younger of two sons demanded his inheritance from his father. The young man was disrespectful and defiant when making the demand, because the demand was the same as saying, “Dad, I wish you were dead! You’re in my way. I want out of here. I have plans and they don’t involve you or this family.” The boy wanted to be cashed-out. He wanted whatever he could get his hands on to finance his rebellious plans. It is important to note that there was no relationship between the father and his young son. The boy had a bad heart.

GASP – Such disrespect and rebellion of a grown child could have been met with death by stoning. In Deuteronomy 21:18-21, the Law of Moses permitted parents to stone hateful grown children. If they did not stone the person, they would often hold a funeral, declaring that person to be dead. Even in strict Jewish families today, when a grown child behaves like this, parents will recite a “kaddish,” which is the reciting of a funeral prayer over a son or daughter, declaring that grown child to be dead. A little later in this parable, the father will make not once, but twice, the statement that this boy was “dead.” The crowd would have shook their heads in disbelief over the fact that the father gave his undisciplined son his inheritance. Not only did the young man have a LACK OF RESPECT for his dad, but he had a LACK OF RESTRAINT and it brought another **GASP** from the crowd.

Luke 15:13-19

13 Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had and 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.”

The boy’s behavior was already bad, but it was about to become even worse. He traveled to a far country, meaning outside of Israel; and while there, he wasted his inheritance. He pursued a reckless, wicked life. The boy had a bad heart. The Greek word for “squandered” is an agricultural term used for winnowing grain. Farmers would throw grain in the air and the wind would separate the grain from the chaff. The young guy threw his money around. He had to pay to play; and it wasn’t long before he and his money were separated from one another. He was penniless! His so-called friends just wanted his money and the wild parties his money would provide. His money was gone. His friends abandoned him. The party was over.

A famine came over the land. The guy couldn't get a job, which means the economy went bust during the famine and there was record unemployment. The only work this Jewish boy could get was to feed pigs. The phrase "hired himself out" means "to glue." The young man "glued" himself to the pig farmer, hoping that he could stay alive by eating pig food. Jews were forbidden to eat pork or be around pigs. This boy was working with and living among the pigs. This part of the story would have brought another **GASP** from the crowd! "You've got to be kidding!" The Pharisees listening to this would have declared the boy a pig, deserving to be in the pit of hell. He's getting what he deserves for his lack of respect and his lack of restraint.

But, there came a day when he "came to his senses," like coming to the end of his rope. The young man hit rock bottom. Living in filth and dying of hunger, he came to grips with reality. He decided to walk away from sin and walk back to his father where he would beg him for forgiveness and submit to his authority. Instead of continuing to run away, he would run home, and hope to be forgiven. Moreover, notice that he returned differently than when he left. He left home with a robe and he returns in rags. He left boasting about his wealth, and he returns financially broke – but also with a broken heart for how he "sinned against heaven" (i.e., piled high against heaven) and against his father. Talk about a change of heart. The boy went from having a bad heart to having a better heart. There's still more to the story that would have brought about another **GASP** from those listening.

Luke 15:20-24

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.

Once again, a **GASP** would have been heard throughout the crowd. The dad did the unexpected in their shame-based culture when honor was to be held high at all cost. Once the son appeared before his father, the Jews would have expected him to grovel before his father, begging him for forgiveness. The Jews would have expected the son to repay the wasted inheritance to his father, making restitution for the dad's hard-earned money thrown to the wind. The Jews expected a public rebuke, perhaps with the father spitting in the face of his son; after all, the Torah permitted him to even stone his rebellious son. But, the unexpected happened! While his son "was still a long way off" indicates that the dad was WATCHING and WANTING for his son to return home. The dad did the unexpected - running to meet his son while he was a long way off. In that culture, running was for boys, not men—especially wealthy men. Running to his son expressed his heart to both PARDON and PROTECT his son. He threw his arms around his son and kissed him again and again – though he would have been covered in pig filth and dressed in rags. He was quick to forgive his boy. His forgiveness was immediate and complete. The dad ordered shoes, a robe and a ring be brought for him - all indicating that

the young man was restored as his son. Why? Before his son would walk through town, before he was seen by anyone else, the dad wanted to protect his son from the hate and scorn of the people. Once back to the house, the fattened calf was killed and prepared. This symbol of a wealthy family was an indication that the father was filled with indescribable joy that he wanted the entire town celebrating the return of his son. It was time to party. The dad had an incredible heart and one filled with compassion, forgiveness, celebration, generosity and more!

Luke 15:25-32

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.’”

Oh-oh. Here’s one last member of the family, the older brother. Too often, when people are preaching and teaching this text, they stop in verse 24 with the return of the prodigal son. Yet, the real point of this parable is about to be made. The reason that Jesus told this story has everything to do with the older brother and his reaction to his little brother’s return.

The little brother had issues with respecting his dad and restraining his lifestyle. This older brother has issues with RESENTING his brother and RESISTING his father. The older brother is out in the field, probably supervising a work crew on their family farm. He was unaware of the party going on up at the big house where the entire town had been invited and were now arriving. He kept asking the servants, “What’s going on?” The verb tense in verse 26 indicates that he asked one question after another. As more people arrived, the louder the celebration grew and as he walked closer to the house, the music and dancing became evident. This is the biggest, happiest celebration the town ever knew—his family ever hosted—and he wants nothing to do with it. It has everything to do with his traitorous, evil little brother. He’s back, and not only is he back, but dad has restored him in his rightful position in the family! The older brother was *quick to condemn*; he *jumped to judgment* and said that “your son has wasted your money with prostitutes.” His brother just returned. He hasn’t even seen or spoken with him yet. He jumped to judgment, thinking the worst of his brother. He even refused to call him his brother, referring to him as, “this son of yours” (v. 30). When it came to his little brother, his RESENTMENT ran deep.

Yet, his refusal to join the celebration and his rebuttal towards his dad is strong evidence that he RESISTED a relationship with his dad. He never addressed his dad with a title; he just yelled at him with anger and criticism, saying that he had been “slaving” for his father. It was all work

and no relational substance. He duped everyone into thinking that he was the “good son” because he stayed on the farm, pretending to be loyal and faithful. It was all a sham, a show for getting what he wanted: approval, attention, name recognition, a bigger inheritance. He did not share his dad’s joy, values, and he certainly didn’t have his father’s heart. He resented his little brother and resisted having an actual relationship with his dad. The big brother was just as wicked and rebellious as the little brother had been. The big brother had a bad heart.

Yet again, the father had a great heart, and what he said to his older, rebellious son would have brought about another **GASP** from the crowd. No less than eight times in this story, Jesus used the word *juios*, which is the formal word for “son.” Yet, in verse 31, even though we read that the father said, “my son,” it’s actually the word *teknon*, which means “my child.” With profound love and compassion for his eldest son, the father reminded his hard-hearted son how he has always been loved by him, and all the father’s riches were already his. And, this might seem like an abrupt end to the story, but that’s the point of this parable that was NOT made in the first two parables in Luke 15.

Reason with me. There is a theme that ties all three of these parables together. The first parable is about a lost sheep being found and everyone celebrated. The second parable is about a woman who lost a coin; but after sweeping her house and lighting a lamp, she found it – and everyone celebrated. In this parable, a son was once lost; but he was then found; he returned to his father. He was even declared spiritually dead but was alive again—and there was a party as never before! The theme, then, is that when someone who is spiritually lost repents and turns to God, being saved through Jesus Christ, there is GREAT celebration! But in this third parable, not everyone celebrated. This third parable was about the hard-hearts of the Pharisees, the legalists who *thought* they were holy, righteous, godly people, when that could not be farther from the truth. They were hypocrites, a word meaning “actor.” The Pharisees would win an Oscar for putting on a show, making people think they were God-followers. The meaning of this parable has everything to do with the condition of the heart. This parable is not about the warm, fuzzy feeling of the heart, but it is a strong warning of Jesus to people with critical, jump-to-judgment kinds of hard hearts.

SEGUE

While Jesus walked to Jerusalem for the last time, and spoke powerfully about what really matters in life, how does this story that He told speak to us? One of the reasons why this parable is so powerful is that it reveals what we are really like—on the inside. This parable that Jesus told confronts each of us as to our human condition, as to what we are truly like. As we retold the story, noting that there would have been one **GASP** after another, we may not respond in the same way with a **GASP**, but admitting there are **GAPS** in our lives. There may be **GAPS** between each of us as individuals and with God, our Father, or with someone who lives in such a way that we jump to judgment. To determine if there are **GAPS** we need to look at the condition of our hearts.

When 44 years of age, Tim Peake ran 26.2 miles—a full marathon—a couple of years ago (Sunday, April 24, 2016). That might not sound like anything special or out of the ordinary, but get this: At the time Peake ran his marathon, he was serving on the International Space Station some 250 miles above the earth! Wearing weights and tied to a treadmill to combat zero gravity, Peake ran the marathon in 3:35, during which time he circled the earth 2.5 times—a distance of 49,800 miles! While he was on the treadmill, doctors and technicians kept an eye on him, and often asked him, “How’s your heart?” In comparison to the three guys in the story, how’s your heart? How’s mine?

If the people in the story Jesus told had some heart tests done, I believe it would be safe to say that their family—both boys and their dad—struggled with **arrhythmia**.

The younger brother, the older brother, and even the dad could have been diagnosed with **arrhythmia**, which means an irregular heartbeat. Arrhythmia, if untreated, can become very serious and even result in sudden cardiac arrest (i.e., having a heart attack). Yet, if diagnosed AND treated, arrhythmia can be corrected. A person can even learn to live with an irregular heartbeat. One more thing – arrhythmia can run in the family. Heart disease can be genetic, passing from generation to generation.

The Younger Brother

The younger brother had a hard, calloused heart towards his father, having no respect for him and having no restraint in the way that he lived. He suffered from **arrhythmia**, having a heart that was not beating appropriately. Moreover, the young man suffered the consequences for the choices that he made in life. He paid to play. Yet, here’s the good news. He had a change of heart. He changed the way he thought about his dad, which changed the way that he lived. His lack of respect and lack of restraint gave way to his decision to repent. Repentance begins in the mind. It’s a word that means to change the way we think. If we change the way we think, we can change the way we live.

It may be that there are GAPS between us and God, our Father, because of having hard hearts marked with **arrhythmia**. We can repent—change the way we think and live—and be restored to God. Imagine the GAPS between us and God consisting of 1,000 steps. God, our loving, forgiving, compassionate Father is in a hurry come 999 steps in our direction, but we MUST take the first step in His direction. And that will require a change of heart in your life and mine.

Psalm 51:17

“...a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

You and I must have a broken heart over the sin in our lives - the words we’ve spoken, the actions we’ve taken, the thoughts and attitudes we have held. We must have broken hearts for having broken the heart of God. And, the good news is...

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The Older Brother

The older brother had a hard, calloused heart towards his younger brother, as well as towards his father. The older brother hated his younger brother and he was angry for the mercy that his father had shown to him, making him a part of the family with all of its privileges. The older brother resented his little brother, and did not want him in the family after the kind of a wild and wicked life he had lived. He wanted no part of the party and refused to dance, sing and rejoice along with his father. Moreover, he did not have a real relationship with his father! It was all work and no play. The older brother suffered from **arrhythmia**, having a heart that was not beating in a good and right way.

It may be that our heart scan reveals the same **arrhythmia**. Are we like the older brother? Are we hard at work *servicing God* but having little or no real relationship with God? We attend church, volunteer in many ways, give financially, attend a small group, and more, but still have hard hearts. We can slave away for God, our Father, yet not have His heart of compassion for people who are broken and far from God. We “may have a form of godliness but deny its power,” as the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:5. [Insert Peanuts cartoon strip] Perhaps our spiritual **arrhythmia** keeps people at arm’s length who have a different color of skin, speak with an accent not like ours, live in the wrong place—or even in a wrong way (according to our beliefs), or they may even believe differently than we do. There may be people in our lives that we resent, and we want nothing to do with them. We are quick to criticize, jump to judgment, and find fault with them in the present, particularly when we find out about their past, thinking, “Shame, shame, shame—how can you possibly come to God after what you have done.” People with hearts like the older brother have been “baptized in vinegar and weaned on a pickle,” not knowing the joy of the Father.

The Father

Let’s look at the Father’s heart. Believe it or not, God has been diagnosed with **arrhythmia**, a divine arrhythmia. He has an irregular heartbeat of compassion—and oh to have a heart that beats like His! That should be the desire of every one of us. Listen, if you are here today and you think that God could never forgive you for something in your past—or even going on now in the present—think again. Like the father in the story, God is in a hurry to forgive each and every one of us! He is slow to anger and abounding in love. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but is eager and wanting to save sinners; and all of us have sinned and fallen short of His glory. When we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ and are immersed in Him, all of our sins are forgiven—past, present and future—washed away by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. God buries our sins and remembers them no more. He doesn’t have some form of dementia. He CHOOSES to forget them, burying them in the sea of forgetfulness.

1 John 3:1

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!”

What a loving Father He is, making this all possible through His Son, Jesus Christ. Like the father in the story who was waiting and wanting his boy home, God, our Father, wants everyone of us home with our feet under His table in heaven. Every time someone makes that decision, there is indescribable JOY in heaven! Celebration there is 24/7!

Reason with me. Heaven is head over heels with 24/7 joy! It is reasonable to believe that there are people being saved every moment of every day all around the world, and when that happens, “all of heaven rejoices “over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:7). The party in heaven never stops! Joy is constant and never-ending! That is why God also commands His people here on earth to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). We had better learn how to celebrate here because the celebration there will never end!

Closing

Jesus told this story while on His way to the cross. It was His mission, His high-calling. We will never benefit from His high-calling unless we deal with our hearts. Last week’s stop on the journey of Jesus is connected to—is inseparable from—this week’s stop on that same journey. The condition of our hearts has everything to do with our response to His high-calling, His mission.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans have some form of heart surgery in any given year. Using state-of-the-art procedures and equipment, cardiac surgeons change their patients heart health, and for the good! Surgeons, nurses, technicians, even pharmaceutical drugs all contribute to the improved health of the patient. Yet, every patient must participate. The heart surgery is a temporary fix. It may be that the patient needs to quit smoking and drinking and begin to eat well and exercise often. A patient must change, and there are many who do not. Their refusal to change means that they would rather die.

How’s your heart? How’s mine? What’s our decision? Will we repent, changing the way we think and live? Will we admit that we are sinners and in need of a Savior? Will we take one step in the direction of God with broken and contrite hearts? Will we have a change of heart, admitting that we need Jesus? It’s what HE DID on the cross that saves us, and not what we DO. If we come near to God, He will come near to us! This is a decision each and every person must consider. It’s the greatest decision a person will ever make.

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