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Gospel of Luke 15:11-24

Father's Love

Hello, everyone. Good morning! The Winter Olympics are being held in Beijing since February 5th. Ryoyu Kobayashi won the gold medal in the men's jumping competition, the first time in 24 years since Kazuyoshi Funaki's gold medal in 1998. All people in Japan are so happy for that. And enjoy the winter Olympic in China and let's pray together that the gospel of Jesus will be preached everywhere in China as well.

By the way, have you ever had a difficult relationship with your children? In South Korea, there is a funny joke that North Korea will not invade the South Korea because they are afraid of eighth graders in South Korea. That's how much eighth graders rebel against their parents. I've experienced it a lot myself. Once they get over this, there is often a fierce battle between parents and children over marriage issues. Also, we experience such as spiritual issue. A friend of mine in Okinawa was out of contact with her parents for three years because she had joined a cult and was living with them in Tokyo. At that time, her parents sent out a nationwide search and desperately searched for her, and finally saved her days before her daughter went to a joint wedding of the cult in Korea. I had been touched just by listening to the conviction and passion of her parents who helped their daughter.

It must be very painful for parents to see their beloved children rebel against their parents and go down the wrong way. Today, Jesus teaches us about the love of God the Father through the parable of a father and his troubled son.

A father had two sons. However, the second son was not doing well. He asked for a share of his inheritance even though his father was still alive. If such a son existed today, his father would have said, "I'll disown you!" and the relationship between parent and child would break down. However, his son was stubborn and selfish from a young age, so he would not listen to his father's objections. In the end, the father gave him a share of the property. **1 Chronicles 16:34 says, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."** Our Heavenly Father is merciful and loving, and He is patient with our mistakes.

A son received a fortune from his father and left for a distant land, never to see

his father again. This symbolizes the sinfulness of man. The word "sin" in the Bible is not the same as legal sin, which is a civil or criminal offense, but it refers to the state of being separated from God. **Isaiah 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."** Because of our sins, we have become separated from God and are separated from Him (1). Jesus compares this condition to a son who has gone to a far country. **Genesis 3:8, 9, "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"** Adam, who lived in Eden, was so close to God that he could hear God's footsteps. But after he sinned, he hid himself away from God. Also, Adam had a close relationship with God where he could always see His face. However, because of his sin, he avoided God's face. **Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** Because of sin, man has fallen short of God's glory and has become distant from Him.

But God asks, "Adam, where are you?" How could an omniscient and omnipotent God not know the whereabouts of Adam? This question was God's grief over the broken relationship with Adam. Still now God is earnestly searching for human beings whose love relationship with Him has been destroyed and who have lost their original form. Adam, where are you? Where are you, my son and my daughter?"

By the way, what happened to the son who was separated from his loving father? Eventually, the son wasted his money on alcohol and pleasure and lost all his wealth. The misfortune continued and the country experienced a great famine. Taking care of pigs is a job that an Israelite would never do. Yet, the son had no choice but to take care of the pigs in a foreign land. And the son eats the pig's food. Eating pig food is nowhere in the image of a son from a rich family. On the contrary, he has lost his pride as a human being and even his humanity.

This shows the state of suffering of those who are separated from God and are in sin. A life of disobedience and rebelliousness from God is carried suffering physically, mentally, and spiritually. During the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites also sinned against God and experienced suffering. **Isaiah 8:21-22, "Distressed and hungry, they will roan through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness."** This verse is still applicable now because in today's international society, there are many people who are fleeing their countries due to persecution and hunger. No

politician is willing to help those who are suffering. Also, no god can save them from this suffering. The Bible tells us that this human suffering, which is common in every age, is the consequence of sin against a loving God who is the Creator.

At last, as the son sat in the cold pigsty eating pig food, he began to miss hometown he left. He remembered that his father's house back home was wealthy and even the workers there were rich and happy (Verse 17). 'Oh, how I miss my father! He was so kind and love me.' The son wanted to go home to his father and he thought this. 'I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men (verse 18, 19).' The son is sincerely repenting of his sin.

Here, the concept of "returning" to the Father's house means a change of direction toward God, a change from unbelief to faith, and a personal union with God. To "return" means to acknowledge one's sins and return to God in repentance (2). Many Christians give this kind of testimony: "I remembered throwing a pebble stone at a frog when I was little, and stealing a ten-yen piece of candy from a store, all as if it were a film, and I cried and apologized God I was wrong." These experiences are the grace of the Holy Spirit reminding us of our sins. Since God is holy, when we remember our sins, we should repent immediately like a child. And moreover, what I would like to discuss with you today is the ultimate purpose of repentance. Unlike other religions, the ultimate purpose of repentance in Christianity is to "restore the parent-child relationship" with God the Father. Jesus said, **Mark 1:15, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel news!"** It is about turning away from sin and turning toward God, and restoring the relationship of love with a loving God.

Now, finally, here is where the loving father comes into this story. "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 (v20)."

The father found his son first, even though there was no image of his former son, and felt sorry for him. The meaning of the word 'compassion' here is 'pain as if one's internal organs were being gouged out' (3). For a long years, the father must have been waiting for his son every day with a deep sorrow. Sure enough, when he came home, his son looked so shabby, "Poor my kid!" The father was sad. This loving father runs towards his son as fast as he can, even though the son doesn't notice him yet.

This father running with all his might represents Jesus, who came into the world for the salvation of human beings. Other religions teach that humans should approach God by themselves. Christianity, on the other hand, is a religion that teaches the grace of God running to man and coming to this world from heaven. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus Christ, like this father, ran toward us while we were still in our sins. He extended His hand of salvation to us through the cross and resurrection. If we simply believe in the love of God the Father, we will be saved. No offering, no volunteer, no good deed is necessary. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." I pray that everyone here will believe in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life.

Finally, the son and his father were reunited after many years. The son cried and said, "Father! I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son (v.21)." The son sincerely repents of his sins and pleads, "I don't mind being a servant if I can stay in my father's house."

But what was the father's response?" But the father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate (Verses 22-24)."The father celebrated his son's return with great joy. The father was filled with unspeakable joy, "My son who was dead and gone has come back. God the Father is as happy as this father when we believe in Jesus Christ and come back to Him.

And He will restore all the privilege of the son. John 1:12, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Believing in Jesus Christ gives us eternal life, and we have the privilege of becoming God's children. That's an amazing right for a child to have under normal circumstances. Why is that? Because they have an inheritance from their parents. If we are born as the child of the king of Saudi Arabia, we inherit all the oil in that country. By believing in Jesus Christ, we as Christians have become God's children, and God has given us the authority to be heirs of the Kingdom of God. Romans 8:14-15 says, "Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

We can call our Heavenly Father, "Abba! Daddy!" When we are sad, we can call "Dad!" When you are scared, we can call "Daddy!" When you are happy, we can call, "Dad!" We can call him every day, 'Father!' Hallelujah!

I have been very worried and sad these days. My eldest son was accepted to a university and I was so happy for a month that all my hard work had paid off. It was as if I was walking on a cloud every day. However, this joy fizzled out in an instant. I can't go into details, but I would appreciate it if you could pray for the young people in our church who are about to get married.

My concern for my son is this. I have been afraid for days because of this almost paranoid thought, 'Oh, my family has had a string of domestic violence victims, and I wonder if this will continue in my children's generation.' But as I read today's scripture, this thought suddenly occurred to me. 'Christians are changed to a different status, which is the sonship of God from sinners. There is no curse of human bloodline. Even if my children are unfortunate enough to be a victim of a crime, God will rescue them from it. Because He protected for me until now.'

God also seemed to be saying, "Yoko, You are not the child of an abusive father and a weak abused mother. You are my daughter. You are a God's child. And Kenta and Taishi are not the children of your abusive ex-husband and you, a victim. Your children are not yours. They are God's children. Believe this firmly. God's children are not afraid of the world." Quietly, hope began to well up in my heart. Yes, my children and I will never inherit the misfortune that has been running in our family for generations. God has told me that He changed the curses of my family and made me and my family call God 'Abba, Father.' As I renewed my awareness of being a child of God, thankfully, my fears disappeared and I seemed to have strength and hope. I am grateful.

In this way, if we believe in Jesus Christ, from that day on, the Holy Spirit will testify with our spirit that we are God's children! He will testify that we are God's children! Hallelujah!

How about you all? The Covid19 disaster has changed the environment in many ways, and it's hard. In addition, we suffer from various problems such as parent-child relationship, marital relationship, and illness. When we are in a difficult situation, we tend to forget about God as our father. We also forget that we are God's children and become depressed. The devil tries to destroy the parent-child love relationship with God through painful hardships. We should be aware of this spiritual battle and maintain a deeper relationship with God. Let's declare together! "I am God's child!"

One more thing I would like to draw your attention to is the father who waits for his son who has run away from home. Have you ever had a father like this? I have not been blessed with my father, but fortunately my mother is a kind person like the father here. My sister told me many years ago that my mother was aware of all the difficulties that I was going through in my marriage. When I heard this, I was surprised because I never had told my mom my suffering before I decided to divorce. However, she didn't say anything to me and waited until I asked her help. The domestic violence environment is similar to a cult, so unless victims ask for help, there is no way to help them. Anyway, my mother was always there for me, even though I married the wrong person. She would come to Okinawa from Korea several times a year to worry about me. These years lasted for 12 years.

When Kenta was three years old and Taishi was one year old, I decided to divorce because I had asthma due to stress. At that time, my mother immediately helped me, and broke down all of her small savings for the sake of me and my kids. However, despite her love, my life after divorce did not turn out to be happy right away. I fell into distrust of people, became deeply depressed, and was unable to raise my children. My mother even though was not in the best of health, she had been taking care of my children and she waited quietly until I was well again. In the meantime, she helped a lot in every ways and she never scolded me once. She was a quiet person who never said a word, but she always felt sorry for her daughter and her grandchildren. Now, she is very happy because I have recovered enough to give a message in front of you at the church. She would say, "My daughter died, but she came back alive."

At a quick count, my mother waited for me for about 25 years. This love relationship with my mother continues to this day. I can't see her these several years in person because I can't return to Canada, but I talk to her every day on Kakao-talk like a Line in Japan. One day, my second son, Taishi, asked me. "Mom, you always talk about the same things with Grandma, don't you? Have you eaten? What did you eat? Where did you go? And so on. Doesn't that bore you?" I replied. "I never get bored with my mom. It's a lot of fun in every day."

Everyone, Heavenly Father is even more and more kind than my mother. Heavenly Father is waiting for us to come home. Let's return to this loving God right now. And let's have the fellowship of love as a son with loving Father every day.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you for accepting us as your children. I pray that our love

relationship with you will continue and that we will be filled with joy every day.
I pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

***Reference**

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- (3) Pity, compassion: p286, Comprehensive Understanding of the Gospel, by Yoshihiro
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