

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Where Sin Increased, Grace Increased All the More.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves in the middle of the parable of the prodigal son. Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word. We will start at **verse 16...**

Luke 15:17 "But when he came to himself, 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, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 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, '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.

In our last sermon we finished verse 21, and this morning we will pick up at verse 22.

But first notice the confession the son had planned...

Luke 15:18 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."

Then he makes, or I should say begins, the confession in verse twenty-one...

Luke 15:21 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.'

The father was so filled with joy he interrupted his son...

Luke 15:22 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.

The father ignored his son's statement about no longer being worthy to be called his son. He wouldn't have any of that. Nothing would do except full restoration.

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Notice it says he spoke to the **servants** – plural. He wasn't speaking to one servant. He was talking to all the servants.

He wanted his son to feel like a prince, and everyone around him needed to treat him that way. The son would stand there and everyone would wait on him hand and foot.

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The first two words he said were...

Bring quickly

The father didn't just tell the servants to do these things. He told them to do them quickly: "*Get moving. Nobody better be standing around.*"

The scene reminds me of the military when someone high-ranking gives a command and everybody jumps to attention and springs into action.

The father tells the servants to do many things for his son and we're going to look at each of them individually to see what they represent.

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First, he tells them to...

Bring the best robe, and put it on him

Remember, the son is returning home after losing everything and having to become a pig keeper. His disheveled clothes would've been completely filthy and stinky.

It's almost like the father hugged him, recognized he needed a change of clothes, and commanded that the best robe be brought to him.

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And notice it says **THE BEST** robe, singular.

The father had a certain robe in mind. He said, "*Get that very best piece of clothing we have and put it on him.*"

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In our day many people have that one ultra-fancy outfit that only comes out for the rare, special occasion:

- For women it is that expensive ballroom gown
- For men it is that tuxedo that we try to fit into for too long

This is pretty much what's happening. The Greek word for **best** is *prōtos* (pronounced pro-toss), meaning first in rank or honor or place.

The robe would have been beautiful and probably embroidered, and it served as a sign of honor.

And this brings us to the first part of lesson one...

Lesson One: The son was given (Part One) a robe for honor.

The Jews lived-in close-knit communities and most – if not all – the local people would know how the son disgraced his father and brought shame on the family. This robe communicated to everyone that the son had been restored back.

Also, the father knows they're about to have a huge celebration and he wants his son to be the guest of honor. Picture everyone else in their regular, plain Middle Eastern clothes, and the son will stand out and get all the attention.

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He was given the full dignity of his father, which relates to the second thing the son received...

and put a ring on his hand

The robe was for looks and the ring was for authority.

And this brings us to the next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: The son was given (Part Two) a ring for authority.

The ring the prodigal son received would have had the family crest on it. This was one of those rings you could press down into melted wax to approve official documents. This gave the son all the father's authority and allowed him to act on his behalf. It was like being given the keys to the kingdom.

The father was communicating everything he had belonged to his son.

I've told you many times that the Old Testament prefigures or foreshadows the New Testament and there's an Old Testament account that resembles what is happening here, and it is Potiphar's behavior toward Joseph. Listen to this...

Genesis 41:40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command...42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck...44 Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

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Potiphar and the prodigal son's father did what is historically called *usufruct*. Some of us have probably never heard this word before unless you're in the financial world. It is a term used to describe the right to exercise control over somebody else's property or estate.

That's what's happening here. The son is the heir of everything.

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Look what he receives next...

and shoes on his feet.

Servants and slaves didn't wear shoes. Even though the son was going to ask to be a servant and he said he was no longer worthy to be called the son, the father gave him shoes that communicated his sonship.

And this brings us to the next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: The son was given (Part Three) shoes for sonship.

What the father did with the prodigal son pictures what God the Father does with repentant sinners:

- He makes us sons and heirs.
- Everything the prodigal son receives symbolizes what we receive when we become God's children.

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Now let me tell you something interesting...

The father is a picture and type of God the Father. But he gives the son so much the son doesn't look like a picture or type of us, he looks like a picture or type of Christ:

- He receives all authority: **Matthew 18:18 Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given TO ME.**
- He is the heir: **Hebrews 1:2 says [God has] appointed [Him] heir of all things.**

Who else BUT Christ could be recognized as a Son and receive so much authority?

But – we wouldn't believe it if it wasn't recorded so clearly in Scripture – being a son of God means being a joint heir with Christ:

- **Romans 8:16 We are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—HEIRS OF GOD AND FELLOW HEIRS WITH CHRIST**
- **Ephesians 1:11 In him WE HAVE OBTAINED AN INHERITANCE**
- **Galatians 3:29 If you are Christ's, then you are...HEIRS ACCORDING TO PROMISE.**
- **Titus 3:7 Being justified by his grace WE MIGHT BECOME HEIRS according to the hope of eternal life.**

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Think of Jesus's high priestly prayer...

John 17:22 The glory that you have given me I HAVE GIVEN TO THEM

Image that: Christ would give us some of His glory.

John MacArthur said, *“Every adopted child will receive by divine grace the full inheritance Christ receives by divine right.”*

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Consider this...

As we talked about at the beginning of this parable, the Jewish practice was the firstborn son received a double portion.

If you were a son, but you weren't the firstborn, you were out of luck.

Jesus is the Firstborn Son, so we'd expect Him to receive everything. But we're made **joint heirs** with Him.

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This is what “prosperity” preaching should be preaching!

If pastors want to encourage their congregations and let them know how they're going to “prosper” they should get them excited about the next life by telling them about the inheritance that awaits them as joint heirs with Christ.

That's a lot of prosperity!

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This is one of the most wonderful truths for believers contained in Scripture.

I'm convinced if we focused more on the inheritance we have in Christ:

- We would have more joy
- And we would be far less likely to live for this life

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Look at the next verse...

Luke 15:23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

The father calls for a party and this continues the pattern of expecting everyone to rejoice that we have seen in the first two parables:

- Back in **verse 6** when the shepherd found his sheep he brought it home on his shoulders, called his friends and neighbors and said, “Rejoice with me, I found my sheep.”
- In **verse 9**, when the lady found her coin, she called her friends and neighbors and said, “Rejoice with me, I found the coin.”

And when the father found his son, "Rejoice with me, I found my son."

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Notice the father did not say bring **“A” fattened calf and kill it.** He said bring, **“THE” fattened calf and kill it.**

Just like there was a specific robe, there was also a specific calf.

Wealthy people had one calf that they kept fattened up for a special occasion, typically a wedding. But it could be used for another big occasion and this was it: the prodigal son returning home. No other calf would do. It would have to be the best for the son.

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They didn't have refrigeration, so once this calf was killed, all of it would have to be eaten.

A fattened calf like this could feed lots of people, and it would probably have to, because everyone in the village would be invited. It would be an insult to slaughter the fattened calf and not invite everyone.

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For a moment, think of the parable of the rich fool...

Luke 12:19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

The rich man celebrated too, but he was a fool because of his selfishness: he celebrated himself, his possessions, and his wealth.

In the parable of the prodigal son they celebrated salvation.

If we are going to celebrate, we should celebrate salvation too: God’s wonderful plan of redemption.

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Now let me get you to think about something...

When we read the previous two parables, I reminded you that Jesus often spoke with hyperbole, or exaggeration:

- Cut off your hand
- Pluck out your eye
- A camel goes through the eye of a needle
- Hate your parents and children

And each of the parables in this chapter contain exaggeration...

Luke 15:6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

We can imagine a shepherd being glad when he finds the sheep that wandered off...but calling together his friends and neighbors and telling them to rejoice with him is a little overboard.

Luke 15:9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’

We can imagine a woman being glad when she finds a lost piece of jewelry...but calling together her friends and neighbors and telling them to rejoice with her would cause them to think she was crazy.

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And we see more exaggeration in the third parable...

Kevin D. Zuber wrote, *“The father’s reaction, like the response of the shepherd to finding the lost sheep and of the woman upon finding the lost coin, was exaggerated.”*ⁱ

We understand the father being glad the son returned home, but what father would give his son all these gifts – the robe, the ring, the shoes, the fattened calf, and the huge celebration – after living so rebelliously?

It is over the top!

The son didn’t deserve any of this, did he?

No.

The father actually looks irresponsible. You don’t treat rebellious children this way:

- You don’t reward them. You punish them.
- You don’t give them gifts. You give them a spanking.

But with that said, let me ask you this...

What do we call it when sinful, rebellious people receive rewards and gifts that they don't deserve?

Grace!

Grace is unmerited or undeserved favor...and this must be one of the most dramatic pictures of it in Scripture.

So, yes:

- It looks exaggerated
- It looks absurd
- It looks unfair

But if it didn't, if the son didn't get what he didn't deserve, it wouldn't be grace.

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None of the things the father gave the son were necessities. He didn't give him housing, food, or clothing:

- The robe was not to clothe him. He already had clothes. It was to honor him.
- The shoes were not given to protect the son's feet. They were given to make him feel like a son.
- The fatted calf wasn't killed to feed the son. It was killed to celebrate the son.

The father did much more than merely meet the son's needs. He lavished him with grace.

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I am concerned that all of us – myself included – might not appreciate how dramatic this transformation truly was.

So, picture this...

The son returns home clothed in stinky, filthy clothes that reeked of pig slop. The father takes those clothes away and gives him an incredible robe, jewelry, and shoes.

The son was transformed from a state of destitution to complete restoration.

And...

It's a physical picture of what God spiritually does for each of us. That is what His grace does for repentant sinners:

- **Psalm 40:2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.**
- **Psalm 103:2 The Lord...3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

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Considering the son's sins, the verse that came to mind for me – which the sermon title indicates – is...

Romans 5:20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: The son's sin increased, but the Father's grace increased more.

Let me briefly explain this verse so we can appreciate it and see how well it is demonstrated in this parable...

First, it says **the law came in to increase the trespass.**

This almost sounds like God added the law to increase our sins. We know that can't be what it means, so what does it mean?

It means God added the law so our sins would become clear...so they would increase to us.

You might not know you're speeding until you see the sign that tells you the speed limit.

Similarly, you might not know you're sinning until you see the law that says what you're doing is sin.

And at that point, if you keep doing what you know you shouldn't do, you're committing a sin that is called a **trespass**.

Think about what the word trespass means. When we trespass on other people's property we know where the line is, but we step over it.

The only way to commit a trespass is to know what the law says but to do it anyway. That's why the verse says **the law came to increase the trespass**. The law shows us the line we are not supposed to step over, so that when we step over it we have committed a trespass.

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So a trespass is one of the worst sins we can commit, because it's done in a high-handed, intentional, rebellious way. It is knowing what God says not to do, but deliberately doing it anyway.

And the prodigal son committed numerous trespasses.

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But the good news is, **where sin** – including **trespasses** – **increased, grace increased all the more**.

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And to be clear, this verse is worded exactly oppositely of what we would expect...

We would expect it to say **where sin increased**:

- Punishment increased all the more
- Judgment increased all the more
- God's wrath and anger and justice increased all the more

Instead, we read, **grace increased all the more**.

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Let me give you an illustration...

Have any of you played the card game, Spades?

If you haven't played, I feel sorry for you. And to put in a plug for choir, I think this should be our official Wednesday night game.

So let me explain it...

All the cards are dealt to four people, and they go around and lay down a card, and the highest card wins that trick. Spades is the trump suit, which means the lowest spade beats the highest card of any other suit.

Before the round begins you bet how many tricks you're going to win, and you feel really good if you have high spades. If you've got the Jack, Queen, or King of spades, these seem like guarantees.

And this is what I would say...

Sin is like the king of spades. It is powerful and only one card beats it.

God's grace is the ace of spades. It is the only thing that is more powerful than sin.

Trespasses are deadly serious sins, but God's grace increases all the more.

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And the father's behavior is a great example of this...

The father never said, "*You can have all this because you haven't been very bad.*"

- His response didn't minimize the son's sin. Instead, it maximized the father's graciousness.
- It isn't that the son's sin wasn't great in magnitude. It's just that the father's grace was greater in magnitude.

Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

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The parable is not teaching that sin is trivial or insignificant.

It is incredibly serious and significant. It nailed God the Son to the cross.

But **where sin increased, grace increased all the more.**

And for us, maybe we feel like our sin has reached a level that's even worse than that of the prodigal son. but if that is the case, God's grace increases all the more. It is still the trump card.

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We've talked so much about God's grace, the obvious question is...

How can we be recipients of it?

I know what you want to say. You are theological people. You know your Bibles. You want to say, "*It is grace. We can't do anything to earn it. That's what makes it grace.*"

That's true. It would seem like we can't do anything to earn God's grace.

But Scripture teaches we can put ourselves in a position to receive God's grace.

And this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: Humility makes us recipients of God's grace.

Listen to this verse...

James 4:6 HE GIVES MORE GRACE. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

There it is: we can receive more of God's grace by being humble.

James is quoting **Proverbs 3:34**, which is again quoted again in **1 Peter 5:5**, which mean three times in Scripture – once in the Old Testament and two times in the New Testament – it says God gives grace to the humble.

Apparently, God really wants us to know if we want His grace, we should be humble.

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I can think of times in my life when I suspect I missed out on God's grace because I was being proud.

Is it true we can miss out on God's grace?

Yes!

Hebrews 12:15a See to it that no one FAILS TO OBTAIN THE GRACE OF GOD.

It says **See to it**. It's a warning. The author says, "*Be careful you don't miss out on God's grace.*"

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The prodigal son is a good example:

- He humbled himself and received everything we read about in those verses.
- But if he was proud, he would've forsaken all this and **[failed] to obtain the grace of God.**

When he was in Gentile territory he learned the meaning of misery, but when he came home he learned the meaning of mercy and grace.

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So there is an interesting irony that I don't want us to miss...

The parable begins with the son wanting numerous things, so he says, "Father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me."

This pride caused him to lose everything, but when he humbled himself he came home to receive everything he hoped to find in a far country: clothes, jewelry, friends, celebration, love, acceptance, joy.

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We face the same temptation...

We want to return to pursue the world because we think it will provide some enjoyment that God is keeping from us.

We are tempted like the prodigal son to run after the pleasure our flesh longs for. But we quickly find out the pleasure this world offers leaves us emptier than before.

God alone offers true satisfaction and blessing. Think of how much the father of the prodigal son resembles God the Father in this verse...

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Just as the prodigal son ran to the world and realized that true joy and blessing was found with his Father, so we find the true joy and blessing we seek is found with God the Father.

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Let me conclude with this...

Warren Wiersbe said something interesting in his commentary...

*"No matter what some preachers and singers claim, we are not saved by God's love; God loves the whole world, and the whole world is not saved. We are saved by God's grace."*ⁱⁱ

This is correct. God loves everyone, but not everyone is saved, because everyone is not a recipient of God's saving grace.

Our pride will cause us to forfeit God's grace. If we want to be recipients of God's grace, we must strive to live humble lives.

If you have never humbled yourself and repented of your sins, you must do so to be a recipient of God's saving grace, which is greater than your sin.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Moody Bible commentary page 1583

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe commentary on Matthew through Galatians page 235.