



Sermon Series: More Than a Sidekick: Serving Alongside Others

To be used with Session 4: Jonathan

Sermon Title Possibilities: Not What I Expected

Scripture: Luke 15:20-32

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the Bible study “Jonathan,” this sermon builds upon today’s Bible study by expounding upon the story of the Prodigal Son. As we learned in our group study, Jonathan did not meet the expectations of those around him. The prodigal son’s father did not meet the expectations of the religious elite either.

Introduction: Some expectations are met, and others are not. While our parents told us multiple times that the brussels sprouts tasted good, that expectation probably did not go well. The new roller coaster ride at the local theme park, however, exceeded expectations. We could not get back in the line quick enough for the next round.

Some of us probably have expectations of our view towards God the Father. The religious elite during the time of Christ expected Him to be condemning and ridiculing of others. Jesus told a story that revealed God to be someone completely different from their expectations.

1. Some expected condemnation and God offered grace (Luke 15:20-21).

The story of the prodigal is one in which many of us are familiar. The youngest son in the story decided it was time to become independent. So, he cashed in on his dad’s wealth and quickly squandered his estate in foolish living (v. 13). When he came to his senses, he decided it was time to go home to his dad and ask for forgiveness (v. 17-19). He did not offer excuses, but rather accepted responsibility.

The religious elite of the time would have offered condemnation when the prodigal arrived home. If it was up to them, they may not have even spoken to the son upon his return. Yet, we find that the father in this story did not meet expectations. Instead of offering condemnation, he offered grace. We see this in two specific actions. First, we see that the father ran to his son and kissed him. Running for a man in this era was all but forbidden as running was considered childish. The father in the story was not concerned with how others viewed him because his son had come home. The second example of grace is that the father threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. The son had just come from feeding pigs and had yet to utter a word and the father was openly embracing him. Only grace responds in this way, even if grace did not meet expectations.

Lifeway

2. Some expected judgement and God offered restoration (Luke 15:22-24).

Judgement is had when one person believes he is better than another. Restoration is had when one person looks beyond the sins of another and offers forgiveness. The father showed restoration in the three gifts he provided his son. First, the best robe was a symbol of honor. The best robe was only to be worn for the best of occasions and this was one such occasion. The father wanted to honor his son's return. The gift of the ring was a gift of authority. The son was being restored to full authority as his child. He would no longer be an outsider. The gift of the sandals was a gift of acceptance. Sandals were worn by family members. If someone did not have a pair of sandals, then that person did not have a family with which to belong. The father wanted his son to know that he had a place to belong.

This did not meet the expectation of the religious elite. They would have been flabbergasted by such acts. Their expectation would have been for the wayward son to be relegated out with the servants, never to fully return to the good graces of the father.

3. Some expected ridicule and God offered celebration (Luke 15:25-32).

As the story concludes, we are introduced to the last character and that is the older brother. A close look at verse 12 indicates that he was there when his little brother was getting his inheritance. Yet, we find in this set of verses, he is less than pleased. We also find in verse 30 that he was able to give an account of his little brother's actions without even having a conversation with him. One would have to wonder how he was able to give such a description, unless he was basing everything on assumptions.

When the father heard about his oldest son's displeasure, he went out to visit with his son. We once again see the grace of the father. Upon listening to his oldest boy's complaint, he told his son "we had to celebrate and rejoice." The celebration was a forgone conclusion in the heart and mind of the father. He was not going to let the unmet expectations of his oldest son stop him from celebrating the return of his younger son.

Conclusion: Some of us have the expectation that God is an upset grandfatherly type of figure who is out to get us as soon as we make Him mad. The truth, however, is that we see the character and nature of God displayed in the father in the story of the prodigal son. He is gracious, restoring, and loves to celebrate. This does not mean that he is accepting of our sin. He offered these things to the prodigal when the prodigal came to his senses, admitted his sin, and started his journey home. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you know the heavenly Father to be representative of the prodigal's father. Take time this week to thank God for being all of these things and so much more. If, however, you do not have a personal relationship with the heavenly Father through His son Jesus, then let today be the day you ask Him to graciously restore you.

Author Bio: *Tod Tanner has degrees from Texas A&M University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has pastored churches in Texas and Tennessee. He and his family reside in Wartrace, TN and serves as the Executive Vice President of the Tennessee Baptist Foundation.*