

Luke 15:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

Analysis

The prodigal returns: 'And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him' (καὶ ἀναστὰς ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ. ἔτι δὲ αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, καὶ δραμὼν ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὰ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν). The father's actions are shocking: he sees the son 'a great way off' (μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος, suggesting he was watching), feels deep compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, visceral mercy), runs (δραμὼν, undignified for a Middle Eastern patriarch), falls on his neck, and kisses him repeatedly (κατεφίλησεν, intensive form). This demonstrates God's eager, undignified, overwhelming love for repentant sinners—He does not wait for full penance but rushes to embrace.

Historical Context

In ancient Near Eastern culture, elderly men never ran—it required hitching up one's robe, exposing legs, appearing undignified. The father's running demonstrated his extraordinary love, overcoming cultural propriety. His actions preempt the son's prepared speech (vv.18-19), not demanding full contrition before granting forgiveness. The embrace and kiss signal complete restoration, contradicting the son's hope for mere servant status. This parable's climax reveals the gospel: God's grace exceeds our expectations, forgiveness precedes works, and divine love takes the initiative in reconciliation.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the father's undignified running challenge your mental picture of God's response to repentance?
2. What does the father's interruption of the son's confession teach about the relationship between repentance and forgiveness?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἀναστὰς	ἦλθεν	πρὸς	τὸν	πατὴρ	ἑαυτοῦ	ἔτι	δὲ
And G2532	he arose G450	and came G2064	to G4314	father G3588	his G3962	was yet G1438	But G2089	But G1161
αὐτόν	μακρὰν	ἀπέχοντος	εἶδεν	αὐτόν	ὁ	πατὴρ	αὐτόν	
him G846	a great way G3112	off G568	saw G1492	him G846	father G3588	father G3962	him G846	
καὶ	ἐσπλαγχνίσθη	καὶ	δραμὼν	ἐπέπεσεν	ἐπὶ	τὸν		
And G2532	had compassion G4697	And G2532	ran G5143	and fell G1968	on G1909	on G3588		
τράχηλον	αὐτόν	καὶ	κατεφίλησεν	αὐτόν				
neck G5137	him G846	And G2532	kissed G2705	him G846				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 86:5 (Parallel theme): For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

Psalms 86:15 (Parallel theme): But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

Ephesians 2:13 (Parallel theme): But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Genesis 33:4 (Parallel theme): And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

Isaiah 49:15 (Parallel theme): Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.

Genesis 46:29 (Parallel theme): And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.

Isaiah 57:18 (Parallel theme): I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.

Jeremiah 31:20 (Parallel theme): Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.

Ephesians 2:17 (Parallel theme): And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Genesis 45:14 (Parallel theme): And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.