

## “Pride’s Crossing”

Luke 15:11-32

3/25/2001 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

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Once there was a very prosperous and upstanding family in the community named the Morrisons. They lived in Pride’s Crossing and everyone in that town went to the neighborhood Methodist church. Thomas Morrison was a manager at Gunderson Corporation in town and his wife, Sharon, was the Head Librarian at the town’s library. The Morrisons had two children, Karen, who was 27 and Michael who was 24.

Karen had done well for herself. She had finished school and went on to Gunderson’s management training program and was now in a position of responsibility, like her father, in one of Gunderson’s subsidiaries. Karen even taught a Sunday School class in their church.

Michael, as well, had a lot of things going for him. He had graduated and was now engaged to be married within a few months. He was planning on setting up his own business with a high school friend down state.

Mike had cashed in the savings bonds his grand parents had been giving him through the years and had even borrowed a sizable amount of

money from his dad’s pension fund. It was all arranged that this money was to go into the business partnership Michael had planned. Tom and Sharon Morrison were somewhat worried about the risks of all the family money going into a new business but had confidence in their son. But shortly after Michael left home, everything started to fall apart.

Just after Mike and his friend Jim closed their arrangements with the downstate banks and realty companies, they decided to have a little holiday to celebrate. They went to New Jersey and tried their luck at the card tables. To their surprise, in a short time, they had lost over half of their savings and investments in their gambling. Michael and Jim went back to their hotel room utterly depressed.

“Well now that we’ve blown any possibility of starting our company,” said Michael, “why not just have a good time while we are here?” They did.

Jim and Mike rented a hotel penthouse for 200 dollars a day. They leased pricey cars and spent several thousand dollars on a wardrobe to go with their lifestyle. They ordered meals to be brought up to them and went out to expensive restaurants and clubs and easily found women who were more than willing to go along for the ride.

Now Michael was expected to return home after a month or so but was still in New Jersey and hadn’t called home when expected. When he did, he reluctantly told his parents about his ill fortune but lied, telling them that the real-estate deal and the business license had fallen through – rather than talk about his gambling losses. Mike said

something about how they had lost most of the rest because they were scammed by a crooked venture capitalist who skipped town with their money. He said they had decided not to go through with the business – but just take a break while looking for another start-up business opportunity. This time it was to be an Internet Venture Capital Corporation. But Michael’s parents could tell there was other trouble.



In another week, Michael, called his fiancée and called off their wedding. His explanation was that he had lost most of his investments and so much confidence in himself that he had to try to find himself and prove, at least to himself, that he could earn his way to support his family as he should.

To say the least, both families were upset and utterly concerned about Michael’s cavaliering irresponsibility – especially with the ending of a lengthy courtship and now the loss of such a large amount of money.

The weeks turned into months and their evenings of wine and nightclubs were only interrupted by occasional phone calls from Michael’s sternly speaking father and sounds of his mother sobbing in the background. Even Michael’s sister Karen called once to try to reason with him but Mike had always resented her for doing better than him. That phone conversation ended with Karen hanging up on him.

One night, Tom Morrison took a late flight to New Jersey to speak with his son. When he got into the hotel, he was surprised to find they were staying in the penthouse suite. On top of that, there were people coming in and out of the door – obviously partying and having a good time. When Tom finally saw his son, he was sprawled over in the corner with a woman, laying amidst single-

malt scotch bottles and some drug paraphernalia. Both of them were oblivious to the world.

Now Tom was a patient man who never tried to force his ideas on others but when he saw this scene in the lavish apartment, he was torn between anger and sorrow. His anger won out and it led to a shouting match with his abruptly awakened son. The long and the short of it was that Mike’s dad left within the hour after Mike told him to “get out, because it was his life and no one else could live it for him.” As Tom sat on the plane going home, tears came to his eyes as he thought of having to tell Sharon, his wife what he had seen.

“It figures” said Karen when she heard what her brother had done. “Ever since he was little, he always wanted his own way” she said, “and now he’s cooked his own goose.” “I wouldn’t even hire someone like him here at the plant!”

Michael and his friend Jim began to run out of money so they moved from their extravagant quarters to a more inexpensive motel on the fringes of town. Jim had an idea that they could get jobs through a friend who worked at the convention center but that fell through. And when Mike and Jim were down to their last thousand, they had a quarrel and decided to split. Jim crossed over into Manhattan to look up an uncle. Mike moved into a boarding house and started looking at the want ads in the paper.

Going home was totally out of the question, so Mike had decided to pick up his life and go with it as best he could. He could never face his parents or even his fiancée again after all he had done.

Instead of things settling down for Mike, they got worse. He ended up working part-time at a fast-food place and evenings as a bus boy in a restaurant. Michael was so depressed that he’d go back to his boarding house room and drink himself

to sleep. His drinking, though, cost him both of his part-time jobs.

It was then that he hit bottom. He knew he had only two alternatives – to kill himself to end his misery or seek help from others.

He went to apply for public assistance in the Social Security building. Maybe, he figured, he could get some food stamps and some counseling. Unfortunately he hadn't established residency in New Jersey so standing up against the Federal and State Social Service bureaucracy, it was like he didn't even exist. The woman behind the counter, in a monotone voice that had spoken those words thousands of times before (but who was lucky enough to have her own job), . . . she said he would have to seek assistance in the town from which he had come.



A few days later, it was an evening and he was walking along the sidewalk and heard something he hadn't heard for what seemed like years. It sounded like hymn singing and he looked ahead and saw a church that was having a meeting. It was Sunday – he hadn't keep track of the days – and he was surprised how he had lost touch with even the days of the week.

He went in and it was a large group Bible study discussing forgiveness and God's mercy. For the first time in months, Michael thought about being sorry for what he had done.

Now this was a Baptist congregation and when some of the people attending the service saw the fellow toward the back of the group put his head down in his hands and how he seemed to be praying – they thought he was a visiting Catholic or something. But what was going on

was a dramatic change in Michael. He was realizing how utterly empty his life had become.

What got to him was the talk of forgiveness. He had a lot to be sorry about. He had messed up his whole life and caused enormous pain in a lot of other people's lives as well. But what came to him like a freight train racing down the tracks toward him was their talking about forgiveness and how you have to have someone in your life to be forgiving you. You had to be in relationship in the first place to be forgiven. And as far as he could tell, he had not only thrown away a lot of money for even years ahead of him – he had also emptied his life of all meaningful relationships.

He thought of how ugly and selfish he had been with his fiancée and his parents. He felt utterly broken. But at the same time, he sensed that God had forgiven him and that somehow there was going to be a purpose for his life. That maybe he had to come to the end of himself to see something or Someone beyond himself just so he could move on with his life.

Well, Michael never joined in the Bible study discussion but walked out of that gathering. He knew that God had spoken to him through his overhearing their Bible study discussion on forgiveness. He left those good people behind and with the last of his money, he got a bus ride home to Pride's Crossing.

When Mike got into town, it was a Saturday. He called home and asked his dad if he could stay in his old room over the garage until he could get his life together again. Soon his mother was on the extension line and he told them both of how he had come to the end of himself. He told them about how he came to sense that God had forgiven him and how he was going to start over again.

“How can you speak of forgiveness after what you've done to us?” his mother blurted out as she

sobbed. But Mike's father said, with broken speech, "Michael, you're coming back would mean more to us than anything in the world." And then Mike's mother fully broke down and told him that she loved him and would make him his favorite pie.

Tom and Sharon met their son at the bus station and tearfully embraced him. On the way home, Mike tried to apologize and explain but his parents wouldn't let him. They were just glad that he was all right. Mike could see that both of them had strangely aged in the months of his absence – as if they had been going through hell themselves.

That evening, Mike's older sister Karen stopped by the house. Even before she got her coat off, she said, "You ought to see a shrink. Anyone who would go out and blow their father's pension savings and their own life's savings, like you did, must be a psychotic egomaniac." After arguing with her parents about their letting him come back home, Karen left in a huff and went back to her house in Pride's Crossing.

Because things get around quickly at Pride's Crossing, some people talked like they knew more of what Mike had been doing than even Mike himself. Mike was reluctant to come to church that Sunday but decided to go anyway. He figured he could tell some people about how God forgave him and how he was going to get his life back on track.

The preacher, that morning, happened to speaking about the eighth commandment – stealing – and during the sermon, many of the people sitting around the Morrisons openly stared at Mike. During the singing of the last hymn, one woman, who had been Mike's Sunday school teacher, tapped him on the shoulder and said, "You know, for the last several months, I've seen how your mother has sat here in church with tears

in her eyes. And your father, . . . if only you could be made to see the damage you caused. Your fiancée's family has left the church completely."

But Tom Morrison turned around and said to the woman, "You know, the past months *have* been the hardest in our lives. But Mike has finally begun to turn to the relationships in life that count most. Most importantly, the one with his God. I'd go through it all again if that's what it would take for him to come back to God."

Unfortunately no one else in the church heard what Mike's father had said. Everyone ignored Mike as they passed him, some even muttered other sharp statements. No one seemed concerned about the change that had happened in Mike but if anyone would have been, they wouldn't have found out. The coldness of the church caused Michael not to want to come back, so he began attending a small bible study over in another town. In the weeks to come, Tom and Sharon Morrison joined still another congregation.



Pride's Crossing United Methodist Church move ahead without "that troubled Morrison family." They went on with their decent and orderly worship gatherings. And that community continued to grow and prosper.

That year they purchased a new carpet for the sanctuary and a new sound system. Within a year, they paved their new parking lot and laid the foundation for their new education wing. The whole church seemed to prosper. When their new mortgage was burned, only weeks after the new building was finished, the minister began his dedication sermon with this sentence. "My friends, we are now no debtors to anyone." ♦