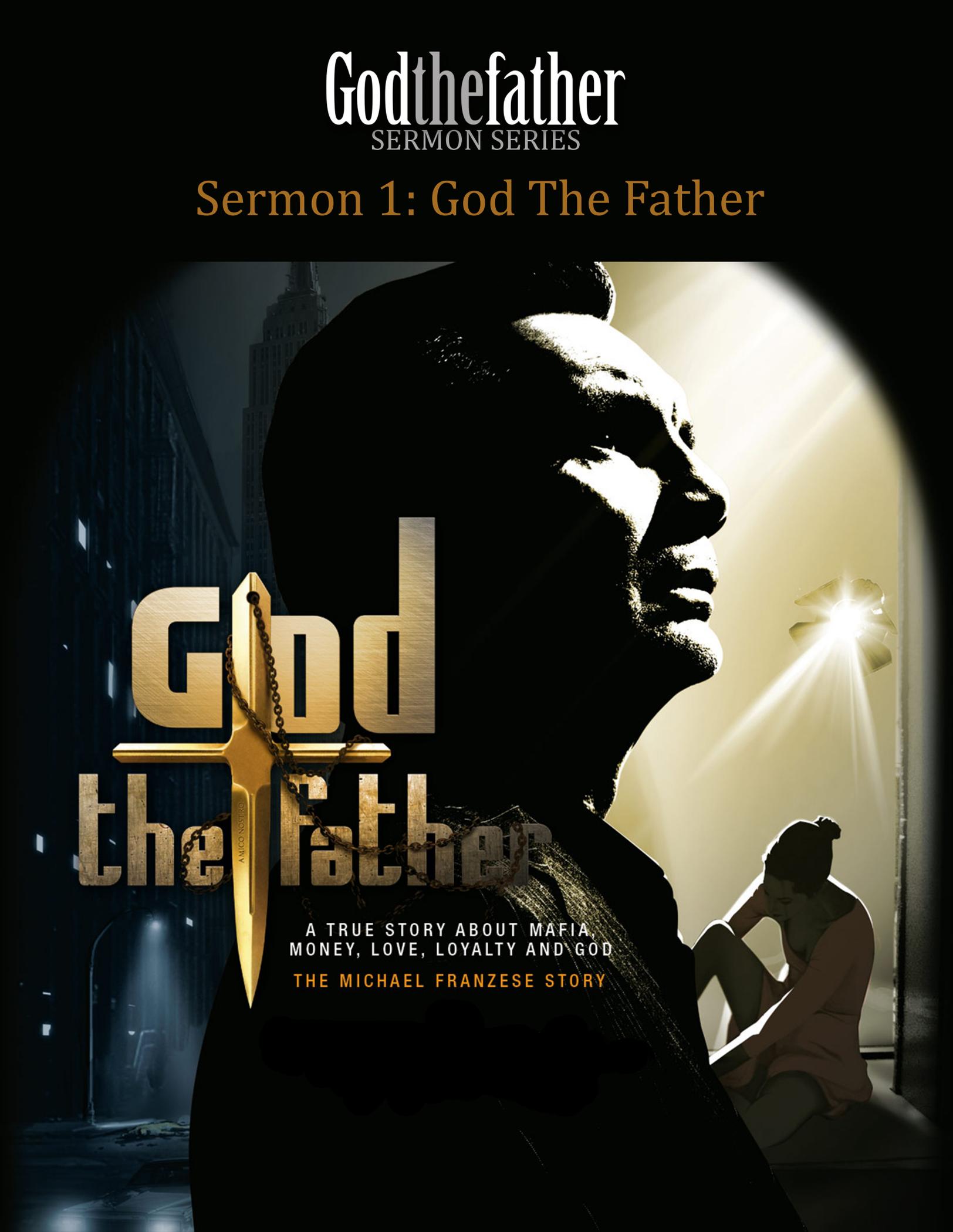


Godthefather

SERMON SERIES

Sermon 1: God The Father



God the Father

A TRUE STORY ABOUT MAFIA,
MONEY, LOVE, LOYALTY AND GOD

THE MICHAEL FRANZESE STORY

God the Father: The Trinity

Good morning!

Today we are starting a new three-part series on the importance of the Trinity, which if we are honest, can be a very difficult thing to fully comprehend—the concept that three things can be totally separate and unique, and yet still be perfectly united...a tri-unity.

Fortunately for genuine believers, one part of the Trinity lives inside of our body, and He, the Holy Spirit, can help us understand God's Word, which I pray He will do for you today.

But perhaps some simple analogies, although imperfect when describing a perfect being like God, can help us to see that it is possible to have one thing also be “three-in-one.”

Consider the simple egg of a chicken, which is made up of a shell, a yolk, and the white part (the albumen). Three parts...one egg.

Or the child's tricycle...three separate wheels that together make up one vehicle.

Or water that can be in the form of steam, ice, or snow, and although unique in individual and very distinct forms, yet all are just one element.

But my favorite is when we consider ourselves...that a man can be a son, a father, and a husband. He has not changed at all and remains one man, but there is three separate persons in that one individual.

Today, we're going to look at the first Person of the Trinity, God the Father, which also happens to be the name of a new film about Michael Franzese, ***God the Father***, who was close to being a Godfather in the Mafia in New York.

At the age of 22, Michael Franzese joined the Mafia and came up with a scheme that brought in hundreds of millions of dollars and skyrocketed him to the very top of his crime family.

Why talk about Michael? Because Michael Franzese is a son, a father, and a husband, but he also became one more thing that demonstrates the incredible power of the Trinity...he became a Christian! Despite the depth of his sin and lostness, God the Father saved this mobster!

Let's take a look at the trailer for this remarkable story, ***God the Father***:

[God The Father Trailer](#)

[ABC Interview](#)

As you'll see in this film, which I highly recommend you do see in theaters later this year, Michael was pretty far from the Kingdom. As a matter of fact, he may have been as far as anyone can be!

His heritage was cursed from the start because his family was linked to *The Family*, Cosa Nostra (the Sicilian Mafia, which means “our thing”) through his father John “Sonny” Franzese, an Under Boss in the Colombo Family who was reputed to have killed between 30 and 50 men.

What happened to Michael in becoming a believer with a worldwide ministry would have then been called in bookie terms “a long shot” or, to put it in his wise-guy vernacular, “fuggetaboutit.”

And yet...God the Father reached into his broken, corrupt world and snatched him out of Satan's clutches. Praise God for the gospel—“*the power of God*” as Paul says in Romans 1:16 turned this man's life around. Today Michael's ministry witnesses to thousands about the Trinity.

In order to understand our Heavenly Father—God the Father—we need to understand a little about the Trinity in both the New and Old Testaments, so let's dive in.

One God...Multiple Persons

*“Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. **I give them eternal life**, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. **I and the Father are one** (John 10:25-30).’”*

Here we see in John 10 that Jesus can grant eternal life because He is equal to the Father. He is claiming to be God—astounding and an outrage to the Pharisees who only acknowledged one God (and that all men are sinners)!

Let's look at John 8:48-59, especially the last part, Jesus, after describing Himself as God's Son—a clear reference to His being the Messiah (*Emanuel* which means “God with us”)—infuriates the Pharisees when He claims to be eternal (existing before Abraham) and God (I am).

The Jews answered him, “Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”

“I am not possessed by a demon,” said Jesus, “but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.

Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

“You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

*“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “**before Abraham was born, I am!**” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

So we see clearly Jesus teaching that the doctrine of God is much more than one God (since He claimed to be Divine). But in order to comprehend the mystery of the Trinity, it's important to first grasp the concept that was a very unique idea in the ancient world...that there was only one God, a major distinction of the Hebrews from all the other religions with multiple gods.

We call this Hebrew truth about just one God “monotheism”.

Monotheism?

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deuteronomy 6:4).”

Israel was adamant that there was only one true God, and they were absolutely correct, still clinging to this truth even today. But there were hints about the one true God of Israel being much more, a complete fullness, to those who carefully read the Old Testament.

One of His names, *Elohim*, implies a plurality, hinting at a fuller depth of His being. It's a cryptic allusion to His plurality, as the suffix “*him*” means a plural of the Hebrew noun, but it is used only in a singular verb form. Multiple, but still singular.

Trying to comprehend something like one God also being a Trinity can be overwhelming to our finite minds, and it appears to be a contradiction to Moses' doctrine here in the Pentateuch. Is it a contradiction?

Apparent contradictions in Scripture are usually only finer clarifications of truth when carefully inspected with the entire revelation. Consider what Augustine said: *“The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.”*

It’s like a scavenger hunt, a cosmic treasure hunt to find all the valuables God has hidden for us to learn about His nature.

Obviously it is not a contradiction, and we can see hints of the Triune God in the Old Testament who is later fully revealed in the New Testament. Consider just three Old Testament verses:

1. God is a Spirit and Creator:

*“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and **the Spirit of God** was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2).”*

2. God is more than One:

*“The **LORD (Yahweh)** says to my lord (**Adonai**): “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet (Psalm 110:1).”*

God (*Yahweh*) is speaking to David’s Lord (*Adonai*)...both names for God.

3. God’s Son will be eternal (forever):

*“The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest **forever**, in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4).’”*

So we see a glimpse of God’s depth and, later on, how He slowly reveals Himself more and more fully as time goes on from the Old to the New Testament.

The idea that we develop more and more of an understanding of God, and the Trinity, is called “progressive revelation.” We learn more about Him in the Scriptures as He exposes more and more of Himself to us.

This is the main point of the Scriptures: His salvation of a lost world, made possible through the sacrificial Lamb of God in the man from Nazareth, foretold in the Temple sacrifices in the Old Testament that pointed to His eventual arrival in the New Testament.

Peter talks about this when he wrote,

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the

sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (1 Peter 1:10-12)."

God reveals Himself progressively over time. So it is with the three Persons of the Trinity. And even in the rest of this first chapter of Peter's letter he references the Trinity, referring to the Spirit, the Son, and the Father.

Now let's move back to the New Testament and examine the Trinity more closely.

The Trinity

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14)."

There are many verses in the New Testament, like this one at the end of Second Corinthians that reveals the Trinity very concisely.

And perhaps the clearest revelation of the three Persons of God in the New Testament is at the baptism of Jesus. We have the Son hearing the Father as the Spirit lands on Him as a dove.

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased (Matthew 3:16-17)."

Or the Great Commission at the end of Matthew:

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:16-20).'"

We know the overall record of the New Testament reveals that God is one God, but in three persons: the Trinity. Now let's examine the first Person, our Father in Heaven, by looking at exactly what a father on earth is supposed to be like.

What Is A Father?

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he

asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:11-13)”

(By the way, as an aside, I think focusing on the father here can also relate in general parenting terms to a mother, too. I don't want to alienate the women here this morning. So if you're a mom, please know these descriptions can obviously relate to your role, as well.)

Jesus uses a very basic observation of the family. If a child has a need or a want, the father naturally responds kindly. Not such deep spiritual truth, right? It's simple. Your child is taken care of by his dad.

So we see in the words of Jesus that the general nature of a father is to provide for his children, but there's more.

We also see in Matthew 7:11 that a good father not only gives, but he is generous, a gift giver:

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

And he longs to protect us from trouble:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing (Matthew 23:37).”

Jesus uses this earthly principle to convey what our heavenly Father is like too; like our dad, He is in all of this paternal nature, ultimately motivated by a great love.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him (1 John 3:1).”

So then, a good father's nature and responsibility can basically be broken into two major qualities of love:

To generously *provide* and *protect* us.

This is what a dad should be in a nutshell, and it is also what our Father in Heaven is all about. No matter what happens to you, God's character is always to lovingly provide and protect you.

But what if your father was an alcoholic, abusive, or even left your family in the lurch?

Bad Dad?

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).”

Someone once said, *“Everyone is put on this planet for a reason...even if it’s to show us how not to behave.”*

Many theologians think that we get our view of God—our impression of how He is—from how our earthly father treated us.

If they were very stern and demanding, then we have a hard time seeing God as loving and kind. If they were absent and uninvolved in our lives, He can be seen as more aloof, distant, and uncaring.

It seems to make sense that our role model on earth influences us and could easily be transferred to our Heavenly Father, either in a positive or a negative way. Some would even go so far as to say it could impede or completely prevent our coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ if our father was a real stinker.

While it may be a factor, Michael Franzese would disagree that a father’s poor example can prevent salvation. Michael had a father who was a murderer, the number two man in his Mafia family, and who even went as far as ordering Michael’s murder...and despite that Michael still came to faith.

Take a look at this clip from his movie, *God the Father*:

Film Clip 52:58 to 56:09 (Sonny’s betrayal of Michael)

How deep and blind in sin must you be to put out a contract on your own child? But the mob is a dark and twisted place where love and loyalty means something else entirely. Look at this quote from another mobster:

“I know what it means to be ruthless. But I don’t remember doing anything, as a matter of fact I know for sure, I never did nothing ruthless besides, well, I would kill people. But that’s our life. That’s what we do.” –Philip “Crazy Phil” Leonetti (on the witness stand, when asked if he considered himself ruthless.)

Can you imagine the humility it would take, the brokenness, to come to Christ as Michael Franzese did in prison? Very nearly a miracle.

Thankfully, our Father in Heaven didn’t order a contract on us. Instead, He ordered the death of His own Son on our behalf.

Greater Love

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13).”

The greatest evil that has ever been done, the murder of God’s Son on a cross, was the will of His Father...God was behind the greatest tragedy in the world because He loved us so very, very, very much.

Just think about that. The worst event ever was God’s will. For your rescue from death.

Have you ever thought deeply on that truth? God gave up His Son for you.

Like Abraham, who obeyed God and killed his son Isaac (in his heart he plunged that knife into his son’s bound body), Jesus obeyed His death order, too. If you are a father here today, could you do that? Kill your son or send him to his death on a cross?

I doubt we could, but the example of love shown here in Jesus’ death is the ultimate measure of our Father’s love for us...and the crazy, absurd, apparent idiocy of it is this: He did this when we were His enemies, indifferent to Him at best, and even openly defying Him.

Even knowing some would spurn His offering to save us, Jesus obeyed Him.

Look at Romans 5:8 to see the Father’s great love for you:

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

I’m sure that there are some here this morning who do not know Jesus in a personal way as their savior, who have not bent their knee to accept the greatest gift of all time, one that our Father made available at immense cost by allowing the murder of His only Son.

What can I say to you today to repent and turn back to God the Father, as Michael Franzese did? I would say this much.

It doesn’t matter if you’re a murderer like Michael, Moses, or the Apostle Paul. God can forgive you of all of your sins. He is waiting, like the father in the Prodigal Son story in Luke 15, for you to come to your senses and come home to His loving arms. He has paid the ultimate price to rescue you from certain death, as it says in Ezekiel 18:20: *“The one who sins is the one who will die.”*

Let’s close by reading part of a great chapter, Isaiah 45, where at the very end the Lord says this:

“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.

They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.’” All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the Lord and will make their boast in him.”

My prayer today is for you, that you will find the deliverance of God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, made available to you in the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

If he can forgive Michael Franzese, surely he can forgive you. And would you believe that Sonny Franzese, now in his 90's in prison, also came to Christ? He will forgive you because He loves you to death. Please come home to your Father.

Let's pray.