

# The Prodigal Son

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Date: 14 January 2024

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] him. My son, the father said, you were always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. Amen. We pray that God would bless his word to us.

There are lots of privileges for me standing here today and shooting this particular parable, which has meant a lot to me throughout my life. But one privilege is to say good morning because we worship at a church plant in Midlothian and we have to rent the building by the hour. So we meet once a day at 3.30 in the afternoon. But every time I stand in the pulpit, I feel like I want to say good morning. And I think that's because in my brain, I have something coming to me and I can't think about anything else. I'm fixated on this thing that is arriving, 3.30 when we go to church.

Well, today we've got two brothers who are both fixated on something that is coming to them. They're not preaching a sermon, but they're waiting for the inheritance from their father. They know that when their father dies, they're going to come into quite a bit of wealth. It suggests in the passage that this is a reasonably wealthy person and they're going to receive that and have it for themselves. The story is entitled in this Bible, in this version of the Bible that I read, The Parable of the Lost Son. I'm sure most people are familiar with this story, even if you've never been in church before, because this idea of making demands, going away, being reckless, and coming back and receiving forgiveness is a common story to human life. It's a trope that we see in stories and movies and books all the time. But the parable is called different things in different places. So here it's called the parable of the lost son. It's also called the parable of the prodigal son, or the parable of the two brothers. Because the elder brother is just as valuable to this story that Jesus delivers as the younger. While the younger brother gets more words dedicated to him in this passage, when we think about the story in context of what Jesus is saying, maybe the elder son, the elder brother, is most relevant to the audience that he's speaking to, and we'll come to that in a second. We're also left hanging at the end, so the younger son is reckless, comes home, he's forgiven, accepted back into his father's family. But the fate of the elder brother is left hanging.

So this morning, what I would like to do is look at this parable through the lines of the two brothers in order to help us see the needs we all have of another brother. The one that Tim Keller called the true elder brother, he doesn't appear in this parable. He's the one delivering the parable.

He's the narrator of this story. So we'll first of all think about the younger brother. We'll call him the rebel. Then we'll think about the elder brother in our story. Let's call him the religious.

[ 3 : 2 0 ] And finally, we'll think about the brother who doesn't appear. And we'll call him the rescuer. The rebel, the religious, and the rescuer. So first of all, the rebel, the younger brother, the first thing we notice about the younger brother is that he's impetuous. He simply can't wait to have what he thinks he's due. And he's covetous. He sees what his father has, and he wants those things.

Jesus has already warned us in Luke just a couple of chapters earlier about the dangers of covetousness. In another parable, the parable of the rich fool, the one who puts all his trust in his money, Jesus says to the crowd that was listening, watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed.

Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. Well, unfortunately, this younger brother believes that it does. He believes that he needs worldly possessions so much that he's going to tell his father that he wants his property now.

This was in a time and a place, of course, where the father was a highly respected figure. Maybe not like today. I don't know. There was clear hierarchy in place.

And the father demanded respect. He was due respect. His son shows him no respect at all because he doesn't ask for his share of the property. He demands it.

[ 4 : 53 ] If we look at the words he uses, he says, Father, give me my share. I wonder, we just passed Christmas, how many children, when they asked their parents for presents, said, give me a Nintendo Switch, give me a brand new bike.

And if they had asked in that way, I wonder what the response of the parents might have been. But the father doesn't respond in this way. The father is gracious and generous.

He takes his wealth, divides it between the younger brother who's asked for it and the elder brother who has kept Shtoom. And he splits it and he says, this is your inheritance.

And the reason this is particularly sad, I think, is because the younger son is asking for what he would be entitled to if his father wasn't about. And in essence, what he's saying is, Father, I don't want you.

I want your property. I want what I will have when you're dead. We expect the father to be irate. But of course he's not.

[ 6 : 08 ] And he divides his property between them. Very shortly afterwards, the younger son leaves. He receives his money and he heads off to what the Bible calls a far country.

I think by describing the speed with which he leaves, we can assume that this is premeditated. So the son isn't just covetous and he isn't just impetuous.

He's also conniving. He's got this plan in place. He's ready to take off as soon as his father gives him what he wants. The Bible says, not long after that, he knew what he was going to do when he received his money before he even asked for it.

And then we come to the part of the story that is maybe described as prodigal. When I was younger, I didn't exactly know what prodigal meant.

I thought it was just kind of general bad. But it's got a very specific meaning, which I'm sure you guys know already. It's about being lavish and extravagant, especially in a kind of wasteful or reckless way.

[ 7 : 17 ] And that's what happens to the younger son in verse 13. The Bible tells us he squandered his wealth in wild living. He wastes all the good things his father has given to him in sinful ways.

And then he gets in trouble because he has wasted the blessings from his father and famine arises. And this young man's wasted his inheritance. He's unprepared.

He's got no safety net of his father to help him. And he becomes destitute. I think it's interesting in the context of the parable that the son doesn't go home at this point.

He doesn't think to himself, I've blown everything. My father's got more than enough. I'm going to go home. He doesn't choose to go back to the relative safety of his father.

But instead, what he tries to do is dig himself out of this hole himself. I think he wants to work it out for himself. He wants to save himself.

[ 8 : 20 ] He wants to do something to sort out his own mess. Or perhaps he's too stubborn. Perhaps pride has a hold of him. And he cannot bring himself to go back to his father.

We see this so often in life. People we might know have drifted away from the truth. There's lots of reasons that we can find to stop us from going back to our loving father.

But we have to remember that it doesn't matter how hard we work. It doesn't matter where we go if we're apart from Jesus.

If we're apart from God. All the day-to-day problems that we face. At home, at work, in school, in our relationships. And the biggest problem we face. The sin that's in our hearts.

Is it irreconcilable? Apart from our loving father. So instead of returning to his father. The younger son here humiliates himself further.

[ 9 : 21 ] He's already destitute. And he goes into the employment of a foreigner. Who we can see really clearly. Has very little regard for him. He sends him into his fields.

To feed pigs. An animal that's unclean in Jewish culture. He's, in a way. Put himself into servitude. To a man who cares nothing for him. But this isn't the point at which the younger son has arrived as a slave. He's been a slave all his life. He was a slave to jealousy.

And then he was a slave to the false freedom of living apart from his good father. Then he was a slave to his money and his inheritance. He's simply now a slave to something else.

In verse 16 we read that this man is so humiliated that he doesn't even eat as well as the pigs. The pigs are better off than he is. None of the choices that he has made in what seems to be the pursuit of freedom have benefited him in any way at all.

[10:26] I was wondering for him if he had co-workers alongside him. Or maybe for us if we were in the office or at work. If we were to ask the people around us for support in that situation.

People who don't know God. People who are in a similar situation as we are. Maybe they don't have the upbringing that this young man had and knew about his good father. What would they say to you if you felt lost and confused and destitute?

They might say just don't think about it. Put it out of your mind. Push it away. Distract yourself. Fill your mind with content. Netflix and music and podcasts. Don't think about where you are and what you're doing.

Or they might say you just need to work harder. Put the effort in. Roll up your sleeves. You know in a couple of months time you might be the guy driving the other pig feeders to the fields.

They might say look inside yourself. That's where true happiness is. You just need to get deeper inside yourself. You need to work out what it is that you are at your heart.

[11:41] And pursue that. Or they might try and convince you that you're exactly where you should be. This is real freedom they might say. Yes it's tough. But at least you don't have your father looming over you.

They certainly wouldn't say return to your father. Your gracious good loving father. And he will forgive you.

But this is the only answer that we have. All the hard work. Self reflection. And all the positive thinking in the world. Are completely worthless. If we're estranged from our heavenly father.

Finally. And this is the turning point of this young man's life. In verse 17 it tells us.

When he came to his senses. Or he woke up to the truth. When he remembered the goodness of his father. And he didn't seem to hang about.

[12:40] He remembered the goodness of his father. In verse 20 tells us. So he got up and went to his father. There's an urgency there. He doesn't clean himself up. We're not told.

We know he doesn't try to find a pair of shoes even. Because he goes back to his father. And his father says put shoes on him. On the way he's rehearsed a whole speech.

About why he's going to tell his father. What he's done wrong. How he sinned against heaven. How he sinned against his father. How he knows. There's no possibility of him being accepted back as a son.

But maybe. Just maybe. He could be a servant for his father. And instead of longing after the pods that the pigs eat. Maybe he could have some bread.

I remember I watched a movie once. This is a terrible illustration. Because I can't remember the name of the film. And I can't remember any of the actors in it.

[13:38] But it's kind of western. And there's a young son. Who is reckless and rebellious. And he kind of leaves the homestead. And he goes off. And he gets in trouble.

I think he starts a fire. And his father, the hero, rides in. Saves him. Takes him back home. And they're walking home. This is the kind of final scene of the act.

And it's beautiful prairie land. The sun's going down. The sun is on the back of his father's horse. They're reconciled. His father's talking gently to him. And the father says, You know I'm going to have to whoop you a bit.

And the son says, I know, Pop. And at the time, I thought this was the pinnacle of parenthood. I thought this man was the perfect illustration of fatherhood.

Because he has come. He's saved his son. He's forgiven him. He's taking him back to the family. But he knows he's got to be punished. He needs to punish him.

[14:42] So that he doesn't do it again. Well, we know that's not how this father responds. This father does anything but punish his son.

This father says, Put a ring on him. Give him the best robe we've got. Put shoes on his feet. And make a feast worth celebrating.

The son had said to himself when he was in the field, My father's got plenty of bread. But he doesn't receive bread. He receives the choicest steak.

The best that his father has to offer. As well as full restoration into the family. So as for us. Because of the work of Jesus.

There's no guilt in life. No fear in death. As the song tells us. Our punishment fell upon him. Yes, we deserve to be whooped a bit.

[ 15 : 46 ] We deserve so much more. And yet Jesus has taken our guilt and our shame. And the father has laid upon him all of our sins. So that's the rebellious son.

And for a long time, I thought that was the extent of the parable. The parable was called the prodigal son. That's what it was about. The man, manly squanders it. Goes away. It's forgiven. But when we go to the beginning of our passage, the story's actually introduced. If you look at verse 11, it says there was a man who had two sons. So we know that this story has not ended. And at the beginning of the chapter, Luke tells us, in verse 1 of this chapter, chapter 15, Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Then Jesus told them this parable. So Jesus is with sinners, as he tended to be. But he's delivering a series of parables here. in quick succession recorded by Luke, to the Pharisees or in response to the attitude of the Pharisees. The ones who thought that they could earn God's favor by obeying the law.

[ 17 : 07 ] The first parable is about a lost sheep. So there's a man who has a hundred sheep and he loses one and he goes and searches for it until he finds it. The second one is about a coin, a lost coin.

A woman has ten coins. She loses one and searches everywhere until she finds it. And then he tells the parable, this parable, of the two sons.

And personally, I can imagine the Pharisees listening to these parables and nodding along. The sheep, yeah, our God is a good God. He cares about everyone.

Even though there's a hundred, he cares about the one who is lost. And the lost coin, the Pharisees may nod along and say, yes, our God will lose none who come to him.

And even in this parable, the story of the younger son, the one who's reckless and comes home and is forgiven by his forgiving father, we can imagine them nodding along because it fits their narrative.

[ 18 : 08 ] But when Jesus gets to the elder son, the one who stuck around, worked hard to keep the rules, the one that thinks that law keeping, obeying his father's command has entitled him to something, then you can imagine the anger that they may feel.

The Pharisees are like the older brother. As human beings, we have our biases confirmed and we appreciate that, but when they're challenged, we don't like it at all.

And the idea of the older son, the elder son, being in the wrong, even after obeying his father's commands, must have been incredibly challenging to the Pharisees who were listening.

So the elder son is angry. First of all, he's angry. He's in the field, he hears music and dancing, he refuses to go in and demands what's going on. I think there's a few things going on here.

So as the elder son, he would have received a double portion of his father's inheritance, twice as much. And the younger son's already blown his, so I wonder if he's concerned that this feast is coming out of his money.

[ 19 : 23 ] Reveals to us he's just as concerned about money as the reckless younger brother was. Secondly, the elder brother's upset with his father that his own good performance hasn't been rewarded.

He says, you haven't even given me a goat, let alone a fatted calf. He tells his father, look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders, yet you never even, you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

The elder son believes that he's entitled to reward. He believes that his hard work and effort in obeying his father's commands is what will earn him privilege.

But our good and faithful father doesn't castize him, he says, son, you're always with me and everything I have is yours. This reveals something else about the elder son.

It reveals that he doesn't value being with his father. He doesn't understand that being in the presence of his father has been a blessing all along. He thought it was a means to an end rather than a blessing in itself.

[ 20 : 31 ] And finally, the elder son doesn't love his brother. That's so clear from the language he uses here. He says in verse 30, this son of yours, disassociating himself, he doesn't say my brother, he says your son.

And he says, has squandered your property with prostitutes, painting his brother in the worst possible light. Not only that, but while the younger brother was away in famine-stricken land,

starving, we find no record of the elder son even thinking about helping him out.

He just feels resentful when he comes back. In 1 John 2, and verse 9, it says, anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother or sister is still in darkness.

It seems as though this elder brother says he's in the light, he's been following his father's commands, but he's still in darkness. He's been keeping up appearances, but with jealousy and pride and even hatred for his brother in his heart.

The Pharisees couldn't understand why Jesus was hanging around with publicans and sinners. He could have been debating theology with them. He could have been ensuring people were obeying the law.

[ 21 : 56 ] They had such a low opinion of the people Jesus spent time with. But in the book of Samuel, it tells us the Lord does not look at the things people look at.

People look at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Jesus knew the hearts of these people. He knew these people from before they were born. And he knew that keeping the law as a way of putting God in debt is not any kind of salvation at all.

So the elder son reveals himself to be self-serving and self-righteous. He doesn't obey his father out of love.

He's kept the rules of the house because he's got his eye on his inheritance. It's interesting that he has kept his act, his pretense, his performance all this time.

But when it falls down is in the face of his father's lavish generosity and reckless love that he shows towards the elder son. So we've got two brothers.

[ 23 : 09 ] We're quite accustomed to thinking about things on a spectrum these days, I think. On one end, we've got wild and reckless and on the other end, we've got self-righteous and prideful.

And maybe where we sit on that spectrum defines our existence. We think about that in terms of creativity or neurodiversity.

We talk about being on a spectrum. But I think maybe as Christians it's less of a spectrum and more of a pendulum because my personal experience, one day we're fighting against wickedness and sinfulness overtly and the next day we're swinging the other way and fighting about being prideful about our performance.

We have a bad day when we're tempted to go the path that we were on before we were saved and then we have equally bad days when we think that our performance before God has somehow earned us the right to demand things from Him.

We're constantly trying to control our lives by leaning into these two directions. So we think we don't want God to control us I want to do what I want and we edge towards recklessness and then we think actually I'm going to obey the commands and earn God's favor and we lean into pride when in fact we need to be in the middle.

[ 24 : 38 ] Of course the work of sanctification the Holy Spirit working within us maybe makes our swings to each side smaller. maybe we don't fall as far as maybe we once did.

But the fact that we still swing shows us the need that we have for one who has never been swayed in either direction. Someone who can stand before God in our place because we are constantly swinging from side to side blowing with the wind.

That brings us thirdly most importantly but most concisely for today to the third brother. The one who doesn't appear in this story the one who's telling the story.

So just like the younger son Jesus left home but unlike the younger son he made no demands of his father before he left. In fact he left the glory and majesty of heaven where all he had known was love for all eternity and he went willingly.

He didn't go into a far country to be separate from his father. He went to fulfill his father's will. And while he was on earth Jesus was never wasteful of anything not even a word or a thought.

[ 25 : 57 ] Everything he did pleased his father and unlike the elder son he never took praise for himself. He never thought I've earned this. He was constantly pointing to God the father and everything he did.

Jesus tells us why do you call me good? No one is good except God constantly giving his father the glory. Jesus came for us unlike the elder brother who had the means to help his younger brother but chose not to.

Jesus came for us. He left glory. He left the glory of heaven to come for us and he paid the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. The greatest ever act of love.

And the seriousness of this cannot be lost on us because at the end of our parable today the father says to the elder brother your younger brother wasn't just away from the family he wasn't just out of the scene he was dead.

The hard truth is that's the same for all of us who don't have our faith in Jesus. And it would have been true for every single human had Jesus not come and not given himself for us.

[ 27 : 13 ] And Jesus returned home. Like the younger son he returned home the young son though went home starving and barefoot because of what he'd squandered because of what he'd lost.

Jesus went home with his feet pierced through with nails because of what he'd won. on the cross Jesus defeated sin and death so that we can also go home to our true home with our Lord.

And now he sits making intercession for us asking the father pleading for us not because we deserve it but because of his goodness.

So in conclusion then I wonder why we are here today. The younger son left his father's house because he didn't want his father looming over him.

There's no real reason for us to be in church today socially. It's not as if people think well of us at work because we go to church. We're not in line for a promotion because of our behavior on a Sunday morning.

[ 28 : 21 ] we're clearly not running away from God like the rebellious son did. Maybe we're coming home. Maybe we've come to our senses and we're returning to our heavenly father with a repentant heart and a willingness to submit ourselves to his goodness.

And if we are we will be accepted. Rings shoes feasts await. Don't delay in coming to your heavenly father today.

Maybe we're here because we think we're earning brownie points. Like the elder son might have done. Maybe we think that God will look at us here in church.

It's cold out there. On a Sunday morning we could have been in bed with tea and toast but we're here. Maybe we think that we're going to add a tally mark against our name in God's book of life against mark us up one point.

Well I'm confident that we're not. even if we were this idea of earning our way into heaven would crush us.

[ 29 : 29 ] There's no way that we can keep the law. We're all sitting on a pendulum swinging from sin to sin. It's only by God's grace that we're saved. We have to be here this morning because of Jesus.

The one that Tim Keller calls the true elder brother, our elder brother, our rescuer. remember in Acts when Paul and Silas were freed from prison and the jailer asked them what must I do to be saved?

They didn't write out a list of laws or recite the Ten Commandments. They said believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You and your household.

No try this, no do that, no it might, it could, maybe you might have the potential, will be saved. And it doesn't matter what kind of unbeliever you were, whether you were wild and reckless or whether you were self-righteous and conceited or anything in between, God's able to save to the uttermost all who come to him.

We're not here because we're trying to earn anything, we're here because we delight in the one who's already earned it all. He's paid the price for our sin. He's taken the punishment that we deserve and we love him.

[ 30 : 45 ] We're not merely grateful to him because that would be to underplay enormously what he has done. We love him, we live for him. As the psalmist says, I desire to do your will, your laws within my heart.

This is our pleasure, the highlight of our week, the place our souls are restored as we travel along life's journey until at last we will be with him in glory for all eternity.

Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Yeah.