

# The Older Brother

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Date: 02 March 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Sing to the Lord, come let us everyone a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation. Let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice. Let us sing psalms to him with grace and make a joyful noise.

So we'll sing verses 1 to 7 to God's praise. So come, let us sing to the Lord. O come, let us sing to the Lord.

Come, let us everyone a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation.

Let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice.

Let us sing to him with grace and make a joyful noise.

[ 1 : 26 ] For God, I bring God, I bring Him above all God's tears.

Let us sing to him with grace and love. God, I bring His hand, the strength of His sins.

To Him the spacious seat belongs. For He in the Savior did make.

The pride of God, O come, let us worship Him.

O come, let us worship Him.

[ 2 : 40 ] Let us worship Him. Oh, His love, His love, His love, His love, His love, His love, His love, His love,  
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own pastures are, and all his hand does he do thee. and he in his voice will hear.

Well, let's join the hearts of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you that today the invitation that is given to your people is to come to make a joyful noise to the Lord.

We thank you that today we can do that with the confidence that there's every reason to do so, even though outside in the day-to-day reality of our lives, there may be storms raging, there may be conflicts, and there may be uncertainties, there may be great trials that we are going through, times of perhaps darkness and even the valley of the shadow of death.

We thank you that through it all, our God remains the same, and you are a God who is a reason today for joy among his people. And so we pray that as we come into your presence today, we would be filled with thanksgiving, that our hearts would be delighted in lifting up praise to you, that we would rejoice that today is the first day of a new week.

It is the day of the resurrection. It is the day of the victory of Jesus over the grave. And we thank you, Father, for that today, that vindication of his victory over sin at the cross.

[ 5 : 04 ] We thank you that the curse, having had its root defeated at the cross, could not hold him.  
And so he was released from the realm of death and brought to new life.

And we thank you that today the church has that same hope, that we share in the hope of the salvation of Jesus, the one who has found us, the one who has rescued us, the one who has brought us to firm ground.

And so we pray that today you would help us to trust in him for our salvation. We want to pray today for your blessing on the young folk in the church, and we ask that you would watch over them as they go out in just a while to Sunday school classes.

We pray for their teachers. We ask that you would help them to grasp the truth of the Bible, that it is all about Jesus, that it is all of Christ. And we ask that he would be exalted in that part of our worship as a congregation today as well.

We want to pray that you would forgive our sins now as we continue to worship you. Cleanse us from all sin and iniquity. We give to us, Lord, confidence that it is in Christ alone that our hope is found.

[ 6 : 16 ] And we ask this in his name and for his sake. Amen. So, boys and girls, before you go out to your classes, I want to just begin looking at the passage we're going to look at today in God's Word.

It's in Luke chapter 15. So if you have your Bibles there in front of you, you might be able to open them up there. Luke chapter 15. This is a very, very well-known passage in the Bible.

I'm sure it's one that maybe most of you here have heard before. We're going to read the first ten verses just now. And I'll say a few words to you, then you can go out of the singing to your class.

But the passage begins and says that the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. So that means that people who were considered very unfavorably, they were outsiders in the Jewish community because the tax collectors and sinners, they were the people who interacted with the Romans and they collected Roman taxes.

So that meant they dealt with the Gentiles. And a lot of the Jews looked down on them and thought they were second class, dirty citizens, really, not people to be friendly with. So Jesus is, they're drawing near to Jesus.

[ 7 : 34 ] And so the Pharisees and the scribes, that's the religious elite, the ones who thought themselves better than everybody else because they were educated in the Bible.

And because they were the ones who decided what was right and wrong in day-to-day life in the place as well. So the scribes and the Pharisees are grumbling, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

So Jesus told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

[ 8 : 48 ] And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and her neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin I had lost. So I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

So these two parables, I remember when I was wee, I was taught a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

And it's an interesting way of thinking about that. But the thing with a parable is to find the thing that's really surprising in them. So if you're ever reading a parable, and you're in the Bible, and you're reading a parable, and it's one of Jesus' parables, you think, well, what's the surprising thing in this story?

Now I wonder, have any of you ever seen maybe your dad or someone lose a sheep, and then think, oh, where's it gone? Have you ever seen that? See, I remember growing up, I would see it very, not all the time, but you know, sometimes when they're gathering the sheep in, whether it's for bringing them in for the winter, or whether it's getting them ready for shearing or something, you'll always be counting them, especially around the time for the sales.

When you're gathering the sheep for the sales, you're counting them, you're saying, now, there should be a hundred sheep there. But actually, when you count them, there's only ninety-nine. And you're thinking, there's one missing.

[10:09] And you think, that sheep, I need to find it. And so they'll go off, maybe go out onto the moor looking for it, maybe they'll go down the croft looking for it, but they'll look really, really diligently until they find the sheep.

But what's really surprising in this story is that when the man finds his sheep, he comes and he says to all of his friends and his neighbours, come and have a party with me. Now, that, I think, was the surprising bit in the story.

It's not surprising that someone would go off and find one missing sheep. What's surprising is just how happy he is when he finds it. I mean, finding your lost sheep, it's a good thing.

But you're not going to throw a party for your lost sheep being found. But this parable sees the man, the shepherd, who lost his sheep, throws a party.

The next parable, it's even stranger. A lady has lost a coin. I don't know if you've ever seen it at home. Maybe if your mum or dad are trying to tidy something up, and they think, oh man, there's a pound gone missing somewhere.

[11:13] Maybe you're like that with your piggy bank. You know, when you've been saving up, and you're thinking, I'm going to have lots of money to buy a toy. And you've got, the toy might cost ten pounds.

But when you go to your piggy bank, you're sure you've had the ten pounds there. But when you go to your piggy bank, there's only nine. And you think, where is it? I know my wee boy would probably go to his sister's room.

And say, is it in Hannah's room? And he'd go looking there first. It's probably under the drawer in his own room. But the interesting thing in this story isn't that the lady has lost one of her coins and she goes looking for it.

I mean, that happens all the time. You always lose things and you go looking for them in your house. What happens in this story is, when she finds the coin, she also calls her friends and her neighbours, and she says to them, come and rejoice with me.

Come and join in this party. Because I found the coin that was lost. And in both of these stories, that's the surprising thing.

[12:17] That they wanted to throw a party over finding the thing that was lost. And that's really the point. Because Jesus was talking to the Pharisees and the scribes.

And they were grumbling because tax collectors and sinners were coming to them and they were finding salvation.

they were being found by God. The next parable really spells it out even more. It was a lost, not a lost sheep, not a lost coin, but a lost son.

And he goes away and the father is looking for it. And when the son comes back, when the son is found, when the son is rescued, the father throws a party and says, rejoice because my son, who was lost, has been found.

And the truth is, God today is rejoicing over finding sinners. I mean, God is the shepherd who goes out looking for the sheep.

[ 13 : 28 ] God is the, like the woman who's looking for the lost coin. He's the one who's looking to find us and bring us home safely. And the interesting thing is that when God does that, he finds us and then he rejoices.

And the point of the parable is he wants us to rejoice in the same thing. To be happy that you're coming to church at all. To be happy and glad that you're going to Sunday school today.

To be happy and glad that you want to sit with your parents in church, whatever the context is. that God delights in people coming to him.

And so you might feel like you're the lost sheep. Maybe you think today you're a million miles away from God. Maybe you think you're really, really far away. Or you might feel like you're the lost coin. You might be thinking I'm tiny, I'm insignificant, I don't really matter in the grand scheme of things.

But I tell you this, God, when he goes looking for you and finds you, is over the moon. Absolutely rejoicing that there are lost people to be found who can come and be saved.

[ 14 : 42 ] And so we rejoice in the salvation that God brings. Let's sing again to God's praise in Psalm 32. We're going to sing at the beginning of the psalm.

I have to apologize to the presenters this morning. I was preaching on this. When Thomas called me, I didn't really have time to prepare something entirely fresh and new this weekend. I just grabbed the psalms that I had that went with a sermon that I preached a couple of weeks ago in Barvis.

And so I frightened them a lot by saying, we'll sing from St. Psalms this morning. So that was my mistake, so I'm very sorry for that. We'll sing in Psalm 32, we'll sing verses 1 to 5 to God's praise.

O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned all the transgression he hath done whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not his sin and in whose spirit there is no guile nor fraud is found therein.

It's a psalm that reminds us about the wonder of God's salvation and how blessed and how happy the person finds that salvation in the years because God himself is happy in bringing salvation to us.

[ 15 : 50 ] So we're going to sing verses 1 to 5 to God's praise. O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned. O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned.

O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned. O blessed is the man Blessed is the man to whom the Lord In truth hath not this name And in his spirit there is no kind Nor brought it to them Where the sun did we bring my speech And silent was my tongue By those men was it all because

I wrote it all day long Fall upon me those day of night Thine hand is heavy high So that my moisture turned in Then summered out there by I dare upon have unto thee My sin acknowledgement And likewise my iniquity I have not covered it

I will confess unto the Lord My trespasses said I And all my sin thou freely did Forgive iniquity Will you please return in your Bibles to that same chapter That we've been reading a wee bit of already Luke 15 And we'll read the remainder of the chapter just now So Jesus continues So it's important to remember in this chapter The whole context is the opening couple of verses So everything in this chapter is to do with The tax collectors and sinners who have been coming to Jesus And the Pharisees responding to that Angrily

Saying this man receives sinners and eats with them As if Jesus shouldn't That's the whole point As if Jesus shouldn't be receiving sinners So Jesus continues And said there was a man Who had two sons And the younger of them said to his father Father Give me the share of property That is coming to me And he divided his property between them Not many days later The younger son gathered all he had And took a journey into a far country And there he squandered his property In reckless living When he had spent everything A severe famine arose in that country And he began to be in need And so he went and hired himself out To one of the citizens of that country Who sent him out into his fields To feed pigs And he was longing To be fed with the pods That the pigs eat And no one gave him anything But when he came to himself He said How many of my father's hired servants

[ 20 : 21 ] Have more than enough bread But I perish here with hunger I will arise and go to my father And I will say to him Father I have sinned against heaven And before you I am no longer worthy To be called your son Treat me as one of your hired servants And he arose And came to his father But while he was still a long way off His father saw him And felt compassion And ran and embraced him And kissed him And the son said to him Father I have sinned against heaven And before you I am no longer worthy To be called your son But the father said To his servants Bring quickly the best robe And put it on him And put a ring on his hand And shoes on his feet And bring the fatted calf And kill it And let us eat and celebrate For this my son was dead And is alive again He was lost and is found And they began to celebrate Now his older brother

Was in the field And as he came And drew near to the house He heard music and dancing And he called one of the servants And asked him What these things meant And he said to him Your brother has come And your father has killed The fatted calf Because he has received him back Safe and sound But he was angry And refused to go in And the father came out And entreated him But he answered his father Look these many years I have served you I have never disobeyed your command And yet you never gave me A young goat That I might celebrate With my friends And when this son of yours came Who has devoured your property With prostitutes You killed the fatted calf for him He said to him Son You are always with me And all that is mine is yours It was fitting to celebrate And be glad For this your brother Was dead and is alive He was lost And is found Amen This is God's word

To us Let's bow our heads Once again in prayer Heavenly Father As we Continue Before you In prayer today We need Lord To be reminded Of your grace But also of your great power You are almighty God And When we do not have the answers When we are Thoroughly perplexed By our circumstances And by the world around us We thank you that Today we can rest safe In the knowledge That you know What you are doing We thank you that you are A just and loving God We thank you that Your justice extends In many directions And that when we see Sin flourish In the world around us We thank you that You will deal with that One day That you will deal Justly With sinners And that's a sobering And humbling thought Father

That as we say These words We think perhaps Of people we know We think perhaps Even of people here today Who would refuse And reject The salvation That is in Jesus And yet At the same time We rejoice That salvation Is to be found That you are a God Who is right now Seeking the lost And that is true Today in this Worship service As we worship And as we Consider the scriptures As we consider Your word Your quest Your search Is ongoing You are looking For people to save And so we thank you That today That is your character One where The injustices That we see Will be dealt with But where there is Still hope For those Who commit These things And so Father Into that We pour all of our Heart And our confusion And perhaps even At times Our resentment Today

Make us Men and women Who forgive As we have been Forgiven And who will look For forgiveness As we forgive others It's so easy For us Lord To be resentful And to be hardened Of heart In the face of Wrongdoing But we do pray Father That you would help us And enable us To forgive We want to pray For those today Who are sick Those who are Today struggling Through whether It's physical Or mental Or even spiritual Impairment We ask Lord That you would Draw near to them That you would Help them And uplift them We pray for those Who are struggling Through difficult And complex Emotional situations Difficult relationships Those who are Finding perhaps A strain On their marriages A strain In their friendships A strain In their relationships With work colleagues All driven ultimately By the brokenness And the sinfulness Of this world And we ask and pray That today You would give us All grace

[ 25 : 22 ] To persevere In all of these Difficult contexts Where we find ourselves Help us In all of them To be Lights Shining For the hope Of the gospel It's easy for us Lord When difficult things Come into our experience To be angry And yet Lord we know That when We read the scriptures We're reminded often That the anger of man Does not produce The righteousness That you are looking for And so we pray Father for Strength to Live holy And upright lives Help us to turn away From sinful ways Of living And help us Lord To live to your glory And what we pray Father for Ourselves And in our relationships We pray as well For the church Generally And we pray for It's witness In this community And we pray Father for the Leadership of the church We pray for the eldership As they serve And fill them Lord With a servant heart Fill them with a willingness To carry the burdens Of the church Willingly and joyfully And we pray for

Those who serve In all the different roles That are important In the life of the church For the deacons And Sunday school teachers And everything else That goes on in the church Day by day And week by week May you bless And equip them For that task We pray for the vacancy And we ask Lord That you would raise up A pastor for this church We pray that you would Enlighten them In the direction That you are working That they would see Your hand upon them Leading them to A pastor of Your choice We want to pray today Father for the same For across our presbytery And across our island And we know Lord There are many vacancies Just now And we ask and pray for them That you would help us Lord As we as a denomination As we seek to train up Ministers That you would Call men into that service Into that great work And that you would Lead them to Service And to Fulfilling work In the cause of the gospel We pray for the church As we seek to support Our ministers And help us Lord To be prayerful But also practical

In how we support Those in ministry I think Lord Of the many who Who are off work Just now Carrying Lord Normally It's become very frequent In recent years Lord That the burdens of ministry Has led to burnout And breakdowns In people's mental health And we pray Father For those who are going Through that experience And we ask that you Would help the church As we seek to equip And bless ministers Going through these hard times And we pray Father For congregations To take on Responsibilities In the life of the church We pray for The burdens of ministry To be shared More equitably In our churches And so we do pray Father That you would help us And give us a vision For how we can do that More effectively In the life of the church Just now We want to pray Father For our college Our seminary And pray for those Who are training And for those Who are being Involved in the Teaching at the seminary We pray for The profs there We ask that you Would bless them And Lord As we think of the church

Swinging around Towards the next General assembly In May We pray for Those involved In that work We pray for the church As clerks But also for Alistair MacLeod Who will be taking over As moderator And serving in that role As a figurehead In the church In the coming year And we pray for The burdens That will be on his shoulders And we ask that you Would help him And bless his congregation Over in Smithton As they seek to Support and Encourage him Through that year As well We lift up and pray Today the community Around us In these islands That are great needs Lord And we pray that As a church We would be mindful Always of The needs that are there That we would pray Practically and effectively For those around us Above all That they would come To know Christ And that you would Bless them In all of their Challenges We know as well Our local authority Is facing hard times We know that will Impact many lives With council tax Having to go up And we pray Father

For the knock on effect On many of these services And we ask for wisdom For our leaders For those delivering These vital services Whether it's in the Health service Or the council Or other ones We ask Lord That you would Bless and prosper Their efforts For the good of our Community as well We remember the world We live in Lord It's a difficult place We've seen this week Sometimes just how Difficult it is With ill tempered men Bickering On a global stage We pray Father For wisdom For restraint We pray for maturity We pray for common sense We pray for justice Lord all of these things Are important And we ask Lord That you would bless us In it We remember that Jesus is on the throne And that the church In places like Ukraine And all that they're Suffering through Just now Would remember The power And the exalted Majesty of Jesus We cry to you Lord for them And we cry to you

[ 30 : 27 ] For them in their distress That you would Minister to them And help them And we cry to you Father for peace And we pray Lord That it would be peace Not at the point of a gun But that it would be peace That is just That is Realistic That is Long term That is secure And so we ask Lord That you would Be gracious To that country And that land And help them In these dark hours We want to pray Father Today for the other places In the world as well Where we know Your people suffer greatly We know there's persecution In many places Lord And we ask Lord That you would bless And help Your people Throughout the world Give them hope And minister to them And of your great grace We ask these things then In Jesus name Amen Before we turn back To God's word We're going to sing Psalm 119 At verse 33 Psalm 119

Verse 33 Teach me O Lord The perfect way Of your precepts divine And to observe it To the end I shall My heart Incline We'll sing this section Of the psalm To God's praise Teach me O Lord The perfect way Of my precepts divine Teach me O Lord The perfect way Of my precepts divine And to observe it To the end I shall my heart In Christ Give me O Lord Give me O Lord Give me O Lord Stand in Come to me So keep thy O Lord Give me O Lord

Give me O Lord Give me O Lord With my■■■ Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 34 : 42 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Well, please turn with me in your Bibles back to Luke 15.

Let's just bow in prayer before we study these words. Heavenly Father, as we turn this morning for a short time back to your word and to consider what we need, we ask that you bless us and help us.

Lord, we very easily, I think, miss the point of this parable. I think maybe even very often the parable has been abused in some ways, Lord.

And so we need wisdom for how we approach it and what we take from it. And we ask that you would help us and bless us in this, in Jesus' name. Amen. So this morning I want to think about Luke 15.

[ 36 : 00 ] I want to think about, in a sense, maybe the whole chapter, but particularly we'll be spending more time thinking about the way the chapter comes to an end.

And the dynamic, the relationship between the father and the older brother. Because that's really the focus of the whole chapter. That's the point that Jesus is getting to.

Along the way, though, we have to kind of see some of the culture and nuances of the chapter itself and see what influences the way the conversation happens.

There's a cultural background to Luke 15, particularly to the parable of the prodigal son, that we miss because it's not rooted in our culture, it's rooted in the culture of Jesus' day.

And there's aspects of that that if we don't quite get them right, we'll take the wrong emphasis. And as I was saying in the prayer at the beginning, one of the clearest wrong emphasis in this passage is the focus that is given to the verse that says the younger son, whilst he was feeding pods to the pigs, came to himself and thought, I need to go back to my father.

[ 37 : 09 ] And say, that's the turning point. It isn't. If you note very carefully, the turning point is not the son saying that. When he says that, what he actually says is, I'll go back and I'll earn from you. I'll go back and I'll earn from my father.

The right to be fed and stay. Treat me as one of your servants. So the younger son is wrong when he does this. His approach to the father is completely flawed.

And I want to say that from the outset today, if you're someone who's seeking salvation. If you're wondering, how can I be right with God? I want to assure you, you can never earn your salvation.

You can never come to God and bargain with him and say, I can do something that will get me right with you. You can't.

And in fact, if you try and approach your father that way, then something dreadful is waiting for you. As was waiting for the younger son.

[ 38 : 14 ] And this is where we miss the context so clearly. The younger son, as he's returning to the father, is oblivious to what's waiting for him.

He has shamed his father. In asking for his inheritance to be given to him early, he's really saying, Father, I wish you were dead.

That I could receive the inheritance from you now. And as he returns to the village, returns to his father's farm, the likelihood actually is that he's never going to get there.

Well attested Jewish records from the time that say that a son who has so shamed his father in this way, would try to make his way through the village. And the villagers would take pots and attempt to smash them on his head.

And inflict such injury that the father would never have to take him back. Because they felt the shame that had been afflicted so much. And so in this parable, when we read that the father saw him from a long distance.

[ 39 : 25 ] And the father ran to meet him. It's again, it's a really undignified scene. A father like this is an older man. He would have had to, you know, hike up his garments, his clothing.

Run with bare legs. Running out through the village. People would have been looking on and thinking, what on earth is he doing? What is happening here? But it is the father running out of the village to meet his son.

And throw his arms around him. And in doing so, shield him from the just punishment that is about to be inflicted on him. That is the son's salvation.



The younger son is saved because the father looks for lost sons. And so today, if you're thinking, I can come to God and bargain, hell awaits you.

The punishment that you deserve will be amplified. Because you have thought a gracious God is someone you can bargain with. Because you have thought that in your status as a sinner, you can bargain with almighty, holy God.

[ 40 : 35 ] You cannot. You cannot. I dare you. I urge you rather. Dare not. Bargain with God. Long for his embrace.

Long for his forgiveness. Long for him to run to you and find you. And so what you realize is the parable, in fact, is there's three incidences of the same thing happening.

There's the lost sheep, the person who we could say is far away from God, has got themselves lost just through neglect, is a way off in the distance. And God goes looking for them.

There's the lost coin. Like I say, it's the least significant of things. It's a small, tiny thing. And today you might feel, not that you're far away from God, but you might just think you're insignificant. You don't matter.

You don't count. And this parable says there's salvation for you. God is looking for what the world considers insignificant and not important.

[ 41 : 38 ] And then there's the lost son. The one who has gone away, who has shamed and scorned his father.

The one who has recklessly lived his life. There's myriadness sin. There's salvation for that person as well.

That probably encompasses, you would think, and this is the way this parable has been taught consistently. You think that basically covers the whole range of human experience, doesn't it?

The people far away from God. The people who are small and feel so insignificant below God. The people who have sinned so grievously against him.

Doesn't that cover everyone who needs salvation today? And it's not. Because there is a fourth story of salvation in this chapter.

[ 42 : 39 ] There is a fourth category. And that is the older brother. Who represents, in the comparison in the parable, represents the scribes and the Pharisees.

Who are still in great danger. So let's think about the older brother first of all. There are things to commend him on the face of it. He's diligent.

He has stayed home. It's a picture of contrast with the younger brother. Who shortly after insisting that the division of the wealth of the farm be split. The older brother would have a double portion.

So the farm's value is split in three parts. Two parts belong with the older brother. One part belongs with the younger brother. The older brother gets a double portion. And that would be the same if there was two brothers or five.

If there was a double portion for the older brother, the older brother would retain us two-sixths. And everyone else would get one-sixth of the property if there was five brothers. So the older brother gets, you know, the lion's share of the property.

[ 43 : 40 ] The younger brother takes his share, squanders it, and off he goes. So the older brother in this story, you might think, and this is certainly how the villagers would have thought, and how the Jewish community would have thought, that the older brother is a picture of diligence.

He has stayed at home. The reason he receives a double share is to care for his elderly parents and to protect the family's property on into the future. He has worked the farm.

He hasn't liquidated his assets. He's been hardworking. It's a picture of contrast with the brother. The brother goes away and recklessly spends his money. The older brother, well, you know, he's so diligent, he doesn't even ask for a goat to have a party.

So the older brother, he's reckless, squanders the wealth of the farm. The younger brother, sorry, he's reckless, squanders the wealth of the farm. The older brother is much more sensible, much more conservative, much more hardworking and earning his keep.

He's very frugal. He protects the family's assets. He doesn't squander them. And on the face of it, he has a lot to commend him, doesn't he?

[ 44 : 51 ] The father even seems to speak highly of his efforts and labor at the end of the chapter. And the father comes out to him and he says, All of this is yours. All that I have is yours, he says.

It's yours now. You stand to inherit it in school when I die. And maybe today that's how you think of yourself. And we often do, don't we?

If you've been sitting in church for your whole life, you might actually think of yourself as quite a good person. You might think, I'm not like that sinner down the road who has had an adulterous affair.

I'm not like that person who's thrown away their marriage. I'm not like that drunk. I'm not like the drug addict. I'm not like the person who is spat in God's face for all this goodness and love towards them.

I'm quite a good person. And the reality is that that defines a great many people.

[ 45 : 59 ] there are good things that we may feel are commendable but then you start to recognize where the older brother's problem really is it's not just that he's proud and that he is, there's no question about that when the father comes out to speak to him after his refusal to go into the party he's all about himself all the things I've done, all the things I've earned all the things that I'm allowed to all the things I ought to be entitled to the biggest problem though is not his pride the biggest problem is that he doesn't share his father's love he doesn't share his father's priorities he doesn't long for the same things that his father longs for in fact he doesn't long for his father he doesn't care about his father or his father's ways you see that in the way that the conversation with the father unfolds there's music and dancing and he calls a servant and says why is there music and dancing?

what's going on? your brother has come back says the servant and your father has killed the fatted calf and he wants you to come in and join in the party join in the celebration just the same as the shepherd who has found his lost sheep remember the the exuberance of his rejoicing as he goes through the village with a sheep on his shoulders he knocks at all of his neighbours' houses and says come and have a party with me I've found my lost sheep you always think it's ridiculous the woman who's lost her coin she calls all of her friends and neighbours and says come and join with me I've found the pound I lost it's ridiculous it's not ridiculous when it's the son when the father is saying this son who is such a grave sinner and has ruined his life has come back the father is right in saying he was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found this son is back from the dead your brother is back from the dead come and rejoice the father is so happy but the older brother says no I'm not joining my father

I'm not going to celebrate the good things that are happening you get people like that and they're not outside the church they're not people who don't come on a Sunday but they're the people who'll sit at the back and judge others you seem the kind of person he is really because that's what the younger brother says this son of yours he says not my brother this son of yours who has squandered your wealth with prostitutes have you seen the kind of person he is he doesn't deserve your grace he doesn't he doesn't deserve the father's embrace and welcome because he has squandered the father's wealth I'm sure we all know people like that people who are self-righteous people who look down their noses on believers people who judge believers all the time believers who love grace who delight in the fact that God has shown them mercy and yet they'll still sit down and say you've seen him going to the table

I would be a Christian but it's people like that that put me off that get in my way they refuse to rejoice in the overflow of grace and it's been shown they're like the scribes and the Pharisees they just don't rejoice they don't share the father's rejoicing they nitpick and there's really evidence as well one of the things he says is really telling he compares the father's exuberance with killing the fat of Catherine's son who has come back from the dead by saying you never gave me a goat you know there's the big fatted calf I never asked for a small goat you never gave me a goat that I could go and celebrate but it's really telling who he says he wants to celebrate with he doesn't want to celebrate and rejoice in his father

I want to rejoice with my friends away from you I don't want you there at the party you're a killjoy I just want to go away by myself into a little corner with my pals you can stay over there I don't care I don't want you I just want a goat and he actually turns his frugality and his conservatism about the father's resources he turns it into an attack on the father because he says you never did this you've deprived me of my joy not the father not the father who's overflowing with joy in his sons he loves his sons but this older brother who scorns and mocks the father's exuberance and grace and wants to turn away the older brother just doesn't love the father he doesn't share the father's joy and part of what we miss in the culture of it is the point that's missing in the third parable in this chapter in the first parable the lost sheep the shepherd realises there's a lost sheep and the shepherd goes looking for the lost sheep in the second parable the woman realises she's lost a coin and she says

[ 52 : 30 ] I need to find it so she goes looking for the coin and she diligently sweeps the house until she finds it in the third parable the question is well if there's a lost son who goes looking whose job is it in that culture to go and bring this foolish son back and the answer is not the father it's not the father's job the job passes to the oldest son the oldest son is the one who looks after the household in the father's place and so the oldest son has the responsibility of keeping the other sons in line and so if one of the sons does something ridiculous takes his share of the family's wealth and goes away to the city and lives his life riotously with drugs and alcohol and prostitutes it's actually the older brother's responsibility to go and find him to search diligently until he does to put him on his shoulders and to bring him back and to say to his father here I've brought your son back

I've brought my brother back let us rejoice and welcome him here let's bring him here let's ensure that he stays here let's make sure he understands this is his home this is where he's loved but the older brother says I went and I looked and I saw he was devouring his living with prostitutes and I don't care and I left him there in the third parable the breakdown is that no one went looking for the son no one went looking for that wayward sinner and so it's hardly surprising that when he does come back the person who didn't go looking doesn't share in the father's joy I wonder does that describe you I wonder is that you today is that is that the way you think about God you think he can do whatever he wants but I don't have to get involved it's a miserable place to be it's outside it's in the cold it's not inside in the warmth and at the party it's not rejoicing in the grace of the father it's just away in the distance in the darkness outside and the story could end there

I suppose in a sense you could say well that's Jesus isn't he really good he's sticking it to the Pharisees and telling them how awful they are putting them in a corner and saying look at how terrible you are but that isn't where the story ends because all of these things are true about the older brother but what's really fascinating is the father in this parable the father leaves the party he takes a step outside into the darkness and he says to the older brother come in just as he ran out of the village to embrace his younger son and save him on his return now he goes out to the older brother to say come in come and join me in the feast come and share come and receive the grace that I want to give you and that's the same today today if you're one of these people who sits away who sits in judgment over other

Christians that you see around if you're one of these people who refuses to revel in the grace of God if you're just sitting at the back judging if you think you're in a high place looking down at all these terrible sinners around you God is coming to you he's showing you the same grace he's coming and he's saying will you not come in he's inviting you to the marriage feast of the lamb he's inviting you to the profound overflow that is found in salvation and in the hope of the gospel quite simply today he's saying Jesus died for you as well because ultimately Jesus is the perfect older brother

Jesus is the older brother who goes out like the shepherd to find the lost sheep he's like the woman who searches diligently and sweeps the whole house trying to find the insignificant little coin he's the one who will go and find the sinful brother and bring him back and today that extends to the way he's showing grace to you long suffering kindness and offering you hope salvation will you not come that is the invitation of the gospel today and that is where the hope of every one of us is to be found that whatever our circumstances whatever our sin whatever has led us away from God in the first place God still comes looking and he offers us life will you not receive that free gift let's pray heavenly father we bow before you today and we confess lord that all of us in this building today need the gospel but we thank you that the gospel is the news that God the father has come looking for sinners to bring salvation to us we thank you that there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents today that doesn't mean that the angels are rejoicing although they do it means

[ 59 : 11 ] God himself rejoices because his search has been successful because he has brought a sinner to salvation and what salvation that is we rejoice today in Jesus we thank you that he is our hope he is where our salvation is to be found and we ask that we would see all the more clearly the hope of Christ day by day in our lives and so bless us as we conclude our worship and we pray this in Jesus name Amen we're going to sing in conclusion in Psalm 130 Psalm 130 Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord shouldst mark in equity but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou may speak we'll sing the whole

Psalm to God's place Lord from the depths for from the depths to thee I cry my voice are here and hear and hear my soul in kingdom voice!

give! God to hear for who shall stand in power should!

whoever whoever I will wait my hope is in His heart.

For God may I, O morning want, I hope it's for the Lord.

[ 61 : 53 ] I say, Lord, I may that to watch the morning night to see.

Let Israel open the Lord, for praise and mercy is being.

A plenty of redemption is ever found within.

And from all His iniquities, Israel shall redeem.

Amen.