

The Heart of the Father

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[0:00] Luke chapter number 15. We're going to try to get into this and hit the ground running. We've got quite a bit of ground to cover, a story that maybe we're familiar with, but sometimes just because we're familiar with it doesn't mean we're really taking it in.

So we're going to read a little bit of Scripture here this morning. That's okay, right? Okay. It is church, so we are going to read the Bible, and then we're going to walk right through it. Here in Luke chapter number 15, verse number 11, the Bible says this, And he said, this is Jesus speaking, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country and sent him into the fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husk that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough to spare, and I perish with hunger? I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to the servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and be merry. For my son was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found, and they began to be merry. Now the elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called to one of the servants and asked, What these things meant? And he said unto him, Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in. Therefore came his father out and entreated him.

[2:36] And he answered and said unto his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment. And yet thou never gavest me a kid, or killed the fatted calf, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad. For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found. I want to preach the message entitled this this morning, The Heart of the Father. Maybe your Bible has the prodigal son written atop of it. I would submit to you this morning, this is not about a son that ran away. It's about a loving father that is always pursuing his children. And I think there's some great truths that we can glean from it this morning. Let's ask the Lord to bless our time together in the Word. Father, thank you for this opportunity to open up your Word. Lord, we're thankful for this beautiful chapter here in Luke chapter 15 that you've really just kind of pulled the curtain back and allowed us to see your heart for us. Lord, we do not deserve your love. We sang about it. We're thankful for it. But Lord, we do not deserve it. But Lord, help us to be reminded that you didn't just come to draw a crowd. You didn't come to preach a message or to feed the bellies. Lord, you came to fill the heart, to save the souls. And Lord,

I pray there's somebody here today that doesn't know you as Savior, that today would be that day. But Lord, maybe there's some here that their heart is far from you. And Lord, you're pursuing after them. Lord, I pray you would just continue to call your children home. Continue to call those that are

wayward. Lord, I pray that you would just be glorified in everything we do. And we ask it in Christ's name. Amen. Thank you so much for standing. May you be seated. Have you ever watched somebody make a decision that you knew was going to end badly? Any of you have any redneck friends? They say, hey, watch this. Never going to end well. It sounds really good. I mean, in their mind, they think they've thought it out. And maybe it was a friend. Maybe it was one of your children. Maybe it's a co-worker. Maybe if you're being honest, it's the person staring back at you in the mirror.

You're trying to convince yourself. And maybe you want to say something. You want to try to stop them. You want to spare them heartache if it's a bad decision in that regard. But I'm sure you found out with other people and yourself that some people are just absolutely convinced they know exactly what they are doing. Ever run into that? I deal with that all the time in my own life. And the Lord has to remind me, I don't know what I'm doing. I mean, as parents, I'm sure you've had a moment like this and your child says, dad, I got this. And in my mind, I'm thinking, there's no way you have this. Like, you've tried this over and over again. I remember when my kids were little and they couldn't read yet. And they'd go to a store and it says, pull. And they are just pushing as hard as they can. I'm like, you want me to help you? I got this, dad. All right, we're just going to stand outside of this store for the next 20 minutes while you keep pushing on the door.

Maybe you've watched someone buy something they absolutely could not afford. You're thinking, I don't know how this is going to work. This is not going to end well for them. Or maybe start a relationship that everybody seemed to know it was a bad idea except that one person.

Or maybe you've confidently taken something apart, knowing you think you can fix it, but you have no chance of putting it back together. You know, you look at my YouTube history, it's how to put a dryer back together. I can get it apart really easy. Getting it back together and working again is a totally different story. And I think we've all been there when it comes to bad decision making, whether you've seen it or you've dealt with it on a personal level. And I would imagine in a room this size, most of us have lived long enough to know this simple truth, that freedom doesn't always lead to fulfillment. Just because you can make a decision, just because nobody's stopping you, just because it's there in front of you, doesn't necessarily mean it's a great decision.

[6:49] It doesn't mean it's something that we should do. I think if we're being honest, some of the biggest regrets in life begin with these words, well, I just thought I could do it my way. It might have been a good song back in the day, but it's a terrible way to live your life. I mean, Frank Sinatra did not read Luke chapter 15, apparently, when he wrote this, when he wrote that song. Well, that's what Jesus does here in Luke chapter number 15. We would probably know this story if you're familiar with this chapter as the prodigal son, but I think that causes us to really miss what Jesus is emphasizing here.

It's not about this wayward son, because when you look at it, there's actually two lost sons in this story. One is lost in rebellion. The other is kind of lost in religion. One leaves home, and one never leaves home. One's sin is obvious. The Bible says that he wasted it on riotous living, and the other's sin is hidden. See, it's not about the sons. I submit to you that this story is about the extraordinary heart of a loving father. And before we really step into this story and walk through it, I just want to remind us why Jesus is telling this story. See, nothing has changed since the beginning of Luke chapter number 15. If you were here last week, we kind of really dove into it, but notice verse number one, the Bible says this, then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners to hear him. So all these dregs of society, all these people that were complete outcasts that were not allowed to even worship in the synagogue, they are coming and they are gathering around Jesus. Verse number two, and the Pharisees and scribes, they murmured, they're complaining, they're grumbling. Here's what they were saying, this man, talking about Jesus, receiveth sinners and eateth with them. So that's what's taking place. That's the atmosphere.

That's the context of these stories. And last week we saw in the first ten verses that Jesus began to answer their grumbling, answer their murmuring by giving some parables. The first parable he gave was of one of a shepherd who was searching for one lost sheep. He had a hundred sheep, ninety-nine were there, but there was one that was gone and he was determined to find it. He also introduced us in verse number eight to a woman who was most likely very poor, living day by day, paycheck to paycheck, and she lost a coin that would have been equivalent of a day's pay. And she turned the house upside down, searching for it. And in both stories, Jesus is revealing the heart of God. He's revealing that God values the lost. It doesn't matter if you have ninety-nine sheep, He still

values that one lost sheep. Not only does God value the lost, He seeks for them. He's going, He's good, He's willing and determined to find them no matter what. He's not going to search for a little while and give up. No,

He's going to find the lost sheep and the lost coin. And what we saw in verses seven and verse number 10 of this chapter is that when they are found, God rejoices, that He finds joy in transforming lives.

But here in our text this morning in verses 11 through 32, Jesus is going to tell a story that reveals the heart of God. See, the sheep wondered. The coin was helpless. But in our text this morning, we find a son who chose to leave, who chose to walk away, who willingly left on his own accord.

[10 : 31] And Jesus reminds us this, that sin isn't merely something that happens to us. No, here's what it is. It's a willful rejection of the Father. He didn't just fall into this. No, He chose to do what He did.

He chose to walk away. He chose to take all the love that He received to Him and said, hey, I can find something better. But here's the awesome thing. Even when the son chose that, God's love did not change. It remained steady. Why? Because He's the same yesterday and today and forever. And as we dive into this text, here's kind of the big idea that we're going to see.

That the Father's grace is great enough to restore those who have wandered far away from home, and it's great enough for those who realize, who've never even realized they're lost.

That God's grace isn't just for one group of people, simply said. It's for all people. It's for all situations. So we're going to ask the same and answer the same question that we did last week. What does Jesus reveal about the Father's heart towards sinners here in our text? What does it reveal in this story? He's going to give us three pictures of the Father's heart. And the first thing that we see is this, found in verses 11 through 16, is the Father gives us the freedom to choose. He gives us the freedom to choose. Jesus begins there in verse number 11, a certain man had two sons. So He's painting the picture, but immediately the younger speaks up and He says in verse number 12, hey dad, I'm tired of this house. I'm tired of all these rules. I'm just going to go live my life. Give me my inheritance. And that's kind of the mindset that this young man came with. And to us, it might sound like an impatient son asking for an early inheritance. I mean, you're like, hey, he's going to get it. Why doesn't he just get it now? No, but to Jesus' audience, to the group gathered around Him, this would have been a shocking request. Because in Jewish culture, an inheritance was distributed after the Father's death. That's how things operated. So in essence, the Son is simply saying, hey listen, since you're not dead, I want what's mine now. I really don't care about what you want for me, Dad. I'd rather you be dead so I could have my stuff. That's kind of what He's saying.

[12 : 49] This is very bold. This is very audacious of how He's coming to His Father. You see, this wasn't just a financial request. He wasn't just behind on some bills. No, here's what it really is. It's a relational rejection. He's saying, I don't want anything to do with you anymore. Give me what's mine and let me go.

That's the idea behind it. See, He wanted the Father's possessions without wanting the Father Himself. And before we get too hard on the younger Son, I think sometimes we may need to look into the mirror. Because how often do we want God's blessings maybe without His authority in our life?

How often do we want the peace that God offers without the Lordship of our life? You see, how often do we want the forgiveness without the surrender? God, forgive me, but just let me do what I want to do. See, we give this young man a hard time, but if we're honest, sometimes we are the same way with our Heavenly Father. Saying, listen, I just want what you can give me instead of what you are.

And see, like the younger Son, we often want God, we want the gifts more than we want the giver. But the amazing thing that we see in verse number 12 is the Father grants the request. He said, hey, Dad, give me all my portion. And the end of it says, and He divided unto Him His living.

You think, and you read it, you think, why doesn't He stop them? Why doesn't He refuse to give Him this inheritance? Well, I think Jesus is showing us that love cannot be forced. You know, try to get your kids to eat something. You're going to eat this, and you're going to like it. Any other parents say that?

[14 : 42] And then you're over there trying to act like you like it, because if you don't, then your wife's like, you're going to eat this, and you're going to like it. I'm like, I like this. You know, it's kind

of one of those situations. You can't force somebody to love somebody. He's not going to say, hey, you're going to stay in this house, you're not getting the inheritance, and you're going to like it, and you have no other options. No, here's what the Father does. He allows His Son to make a choice.

And it just reminds us that God doesn't force people into obedience. That's not how God operates. No, here's what He does. He invites them into relationship. We see that all throughout Scripture. We see it from the Old Testament all the way into the New Testament, that He is not forcing Himself. No, God is a gentleman. He is inviting. He's giving all the evidence. He shows us all the truth, but He lets us choose. But since we have a choice, He also allows them to walk away if they choose.

And that's what's taking place here in this text. Notice how quickly He leaves, and not many days after the younger son gathered all together. I mean, He converts everything into cash. He cuts every tie to home, and He leaves without looking back. That's what the Bible tells us, that He gathered, and He took His journey into a far country, and there wasted His substance with riotous living.

You see, the far country had become attractive to Him, because in His heart and in His mind, He believed life would be much better without His Father always looking over His shoulder, without His Father telling Him what to do, and where to go, and how to live. But here's the reality.

[16:24] The far country wasn't just a place. It was a condition of His heart. That's what it was. You see, He left home long before He packed His bags, long before He was already there. And I think it works the same way in our lives. Before there's ever outward rebellion, there's an inward wandering in our heart. That's why we sing that old song, hey, bind my heart. I'm prone to wonder. Lord, I feel it. Listen, we have that within us. Because the truth is, nobody wakes up one morning and says, you know what? I'm going to abandon God today. That's not how that works. No, the drift begins in the heart. So He gathers His things, He goes to the country, and He wastes all His inheritance.

That word waste means what you think it means. It means to scatter, to throw away, to squander. Father, everything the Father gave Him, He wasted it. He just thought He was living for Himself. Listen, that's what sin does, by the way. You know what sin does? It wastes opportunities. It wastes relationships. It wastes years of your life. It wastes God's good gifts.

I'm sure you've heard it, but sin always promises more than it could deliver. It looks so fancy. It looks so fun. It looks like everybody's involved with it. But here's what it does. It advertises freedom, but produces slavery in your life. Read Romans chapter 6. That became His master. So He's there, and He's living life, and He thinks everything's really good. But here's the problem. The money runs out. The friends disappear. The fun ended. And on top of that, to add insult to injury, verse 14, and when He had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land. So now He's there.

He's in this far country. He's away from everybody that loves Him. He's wasted everything, and now there's a famine. And the young man who demanded his inheritance and said, Father, I'd be much better without you. Now in verse 15 and 16, He's living in a pig pen, literally. The Bible says that He joined Himself to a citizen of that country. And once again, just a little background history for us.

[18:56] To us, we think, okay, He went on a trip. This would be a Jewish man living in a Gentile country, which was a no-go for them. And He's working as a hired servant, the lowest of low. And not only is he working for this man, he's feeding pigs which were ceremonially unclean. I mean, this is called the bottom of the barrel. That is where this man is. But it's just a constant picture in this text of reminding us of what sin does. When he left home, he didn't think, man, you know, one day, I'm probably going to be in a pig pen. It's going to be amazing. No. We never think that. We never think that that's where that decision is going to take us, how that's going to play out. I mean, my preacher said it all the time growing up. I mean, it's just kind of ingrained in my brain. But sin, it takes you farther than you intend to go. It keeps you longer than you intend to stay.

And it costs you a lot more than you ever intended to pay. That's where this man is. That's the life that he is living. Because he thought, he said, the Father really doesn't love me. He didn't realize how good he had it. Because he thought in his mind, there's got to be more to life than this. There's got to be more to life. There's got to be satisfaction outside of these walls, outside of these rules, outside of this law. That's what he was thinking. That's where he was living. And may I ask you, where have you been looking for satisfaction?

Where have you convinced yourself, if I just had this, I'd be happy? It might be a raise. It might be more money. It might be a different relationship, an accomplishment, more success.

But I think the younger son teaches us a lesson that will never outgrow. And here's what he's teaching us in these first few verses, that anything we pursue apart from the Father will always leave us empty-handed. He has nothing to show for his life. He wasted it all. He spent all, the Bible says. It makes it very clear. He had nothing. But yet, when he took that journey, he thought, I'm going to find everything. It's all out there. I just got to find it.

Why was he empty-handed? Because the greatest gift the Father can ever give a child, the greatest gift that our Heavenly Father can ever give us, is not the gifts of himself. It's him.

[21 : 28] He missed what the real gift was. He thought, you know what, my dad knows nothing. Just give me my money so I can run. He didn't realize the most important thing he ever had in his life was his father. That his father loved him, and he took care of him, and he had everything he possibly could need. But I'm so thankful that this story doesn't end in the pig pen.

Sometimes God allows us, and we have to come to the end of ourselves, so we can discover that everything we've been searching for has been found in him all along. That's where this young man had to come. And in these next verses, Jesus introduces us to a wonderful picture of grace that's found all throughout Scripture, from Genesis to the book of Revelation, that a father never stopped watching, he never stopped loving, he never stopped waiting for his son to come home. So not only does God give us the choice to choose our life, but he never stopped waiting for his son to come home. He will return. He joyfully receives those who return in verse 17 through 24. I mean, verses 11 through 16 are depressing. I mean, they leave us with this feeling of the emptiness of sin, and it should.

We need to be reminded that's where sin leads. It only leads to death. It doesn't lead to anything good. But I'm so thankful for this second part, because it hopefully is going to leave us just marveling at the grace of God. But Larry sang about it this morning. I'm so thankful for the grace of God. But the Apostle Paul said, it's by the grace of God I am what I am. It's by the grace of God that we're here. It's by the grace of God that he loves us. And probably my favorite line in this whole story is verse number 17, and when he came to himself. You ever had that aha moment? We call it aha realization, like what am I doing? We've had that moment, maybe you were running, maybe you were looking for satisfaction, and it's just like the light goes off. Here's what it is. It's the Holy Spirit saying, hey, there's more to life than this. And he said, I got to change something. This is not working. I mean, it would have been much better if he did it before he got to the big pen, but I'm thankful it doesn't matter if you're in the pig pen or you're on the way to the big pen. You got to come to yourself and realize, hey, God has something much better for me. And that's what we see in verse number 17, that the younger son had been living under the illusion that life away from his father would be so satisfying. But the illusion's gone, the money's gone, the friends are gone, the pleasure's gone, and now he's facing reality. Why am I here? How did I get here?

And that's a wonderful place to be, actually, because that's where repentance truly takes place. The Bible tells us in Matthew chapter 5, verse number 3, blessed are the poor in spirit. You know where salvation begins? When you realize you are spiritually bankrupt, that you have nothing.

And if something doesn't change, and if God doesn't show up, then it's not going to end well, and we begin to stop blaming everyone else and honestly see ourselves before God as who we are.

[24 : 55] The Bible says in verse 17, he came to himself. He didn't blame the famine. He said, man, I'd be fine if there wasn't this stinking famine in the land. Hey, I'd be fine if some of those friends that I, that borrowed some money, they'd just pay me back. I mean, what's their deal? He doesn't blame his father saying, well, if he really loved me, he wouldn't have given me this inheritance.

Sometimes we can blame God for things that we ask for. Some of the, some of the worst things we can have in life is God finally gives us what we want. Because sometimes we have to learn the lesson the hard way. He doesn't make excuses. We don't find that anywhere here in these verses. No, here's what he recognizes. I'm the problem. It's my sin that put me here. And no one is ever saved until they first realize they're lost. See, he was fine when he was living it up, when life was good, so to speak, when the pleasure was there and when the money was flowing and the friends were all around. But he realized for the first time since leaving home, he begins thinking about somebody other than himself.

He begins to think about his father. When he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough to spare and I perish with hunger? I mean, life will hit you really, really hard in the face when he's thinking about his home and the lavish spread they used to have

all the time. He thought that was just normal. Now he's in a pig pen just trying to maybe eat some husk that they have. You ever seen, I mean, I grew up in the city, but first time I saw a pig pen, I was like, I get it now. That's disgusting. You know, walking, I remember we, I think Brother Kevin took us out there to the, when they were showing pigs, we were walking to the barn, I'm like, this is gross. Listen, I'm for bacon.

I'm not for going into barns. You know, that's just kind of, that's more, that's kind of how I roll. I mean, that will make anybody come to themselves. But notice what he remembers about his father. He remembers the kindness of his father.

He didn't say, oh man, I love how my dad treats his family. No, he said, my father's so good, he even treats his servants well. How many servants at home just have enough bread? I mean, they have bread for me to have some. They'd have enough to spare. And suddenly he realizes, man, life in my father's house is actually a lot better than a far country. I wish I would have stayed there. You see, sin can convince you that you're missing out of, by following God. Yeah, you're missing out of things. You're missing out of guilt and shame and heartache and regret and pain and difficulty. You're missing out on a lot of those things. But sooner or later, we're going to discover that it's not difficult, that God loves us, and he's going to walk with us through this life. And there's no better place to be than in the father's house, to be in the family, to be near to him. He's going to take care of us. He's going to care for us. He's going to love us. And so in verses 18 and 19, the son makes one of the greatest decisions. He says, hey, listen, I'm going to go back. I'm going to tell my father, [28:01] I'm sorry, father. I've sinned. I messed up. And we see in verse 18 and 19, he doesn't just feel guilty. He acts. You know, sometimes I know growing up, this hypothetical, of course, I felt guilty, but I didn't do anything about it. You know, when I was, I was sad because my dad knew now, but you know what? It didn't really change anything. No, no, here's what we see this son do.

He begins to act because true repentance is more than sorrow. No, no, true biblical repentance, here's what it does. It changes direction. He was going this way. He said, this is not working. I need to go back the other way. I need to turn toward the father. I need to turn towards him. And that's what repentance does. He's no longer running from his father. Now he's running to his father. And he's got this speech prepared. Maybe he's got a note card he keeps looking at, making sure he's going to say the right thing when he shows back up. That's what we see in verse number 19. We see the humility. There's no self-defense. There's no attempt to negotiate. He's just said, hey, when I get home, I'm going to see dad and I'm going to say, dad, make me a hired servant. There's no self-defense. There's no self-defense. There's no self-defense. There's no self-defense. Because he knows in his mind that he has forfeited the right to be called a son. So he's just willing just to be in the house, just to have some provision in his life.

[29:31] Maybe in his mind he thought, well, if I get home and I work real hard, maybe I can earn my way back. Maybe I can earn my way back into dad's good graces. Maybe he thinks, I'll just spend the rest of my life paying off the debt and that's going to be okay because I know this, my God, my father will take care of me. Maybe that was his mindset. And that mindset I would submit to you today is still alive and well. Maybe you've wondered from God, maybe life is not where it should be and maybe God has kind of woke you up and said, hey, something's got to change. Let me just remind you, it's not if I just do good enough. Your life's not all about if I clean myself up, if I prove myself, then maybe God will take me back. No, there's something even greater than that. It's called grace. That's not how grace works. We're saved by grace. We're kept by grace. We're sustained by grace. We don't have to earn it. It was freely given to us. Now it cost Jesus his life on the cross.

But I love this. This son, he's rehearsing this speech in his head and he's thinking, man, I hope this works. But before he ever got home, dad was looking. Look at verse number 20.

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, the father saw him. How? Because he was looking. Because he was waiting. Because this is what he had been praying for day after day, week after week, month after month, perhaps year after year. He just wanted his son to come home. And though the son's heart was far from his father's house, his father's heart was never far from the son. Every morning he may walk up and say, hey, this might be the day my son comes home. And I'm going to be ready and I'm going to be waiting. And what a picture of God's heart towards sinners. Listen, God is not reluctant to receive sinners. He's not saying, ugh, that guy looks like he's been in the pig pen. No, here's what he does. He picks us up. He cleans us off himself.

He sets our feet on a rock. He establishes a joy and peace and hope in our hearts. No, God longs for his children to come home. The father doesn't just see his son. Notice what it says. He had compassion.

That word means he was moved. He was moved to action. His compassion wasn't cold. It wasn't distant. It wasn't just merely intellectual. No, his heart broke for his son.

[32 : 11] But then comes one of the most surprising moments in all of Scripture, and especially for the original listeners that had been gathered around Jesus. Not only did he have compassion, here's what the father did.

He ran. That was a no-go in the Middle Eastern world. Middle Eastern patriarchs did not run. That would have disgraced themselves. They would have to gird up their robes a little bit, and they would have exposed their legs. And in that situation, and in that culture, that was an absolutely awful thing. Men did not run. Some of you are like, man, that's my life verse now. I'm not running. I hear all the verse I run. Oh, the wicked run when nobody chases. Get over it. But in this culture, in this story, when he said, and the father ran, they would have been like, you can't do that. You can't run. But you know what we see here? That the father willingly lays aside his dignity because his son matters more to him than his own reputation. Read Philippians chapter 2, that Jesus became of no reputation, that he humbled himself as a servant. Why? Because he loved us more than his own reputation. And we see God running in this story. And many Bible scholars point out that a young Jewish man that would have done something like this, gone and wasted his living on, especially with the Gentiles, they would have had a ceremony called the Kazaza. I'm sure that's completely wrong, but that's just what it looks like when I say it. But here's what it was. When this young man would have come back, the community, the little village he would have been in, they would have gathered around him. They would have publicly rejected him. They would have declared him cut off from any help, any community, anything like that. But before the village could reach him, the father does. He shields him from it. He runs. He embraces him. He publicly identifies with his son. And instead of allowing his son to bear the shame alone, he bears it himself. I think we can see the picture that Jesus willingly bore our sin and our shame.

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5, 21, he became sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, that he took our place, he endured the cross so that we could receive that embrace from the father, that invites us into his house, and invites us into his table. And Jesus continues and says, and he fell on his neck, and he kissed him. He was showing affection. He was showing joy, just like the lost sheep, just like the lost coin. When lost sinners are found, the father rejoices.

[35 : 08] And the son begins to immediately go into his speech that he had rehearsed. He pulls his note card out of his pocket, and he begins to say it. But before he could finish, the father said, hey, none of that. Go get a robe. Go get the ring. Go kill the fatted calf. You know what that is? That's grace.

God doesn't love us because we've earned it. God loves us because that's who he is. That's what we see in this picture. He never has to ask to be a hired servant. The father says there in verse number 22, bring forth the best robe. Most likely in whose robe this would have been? The father's. Because he's the father of the house. He's going to have the best robe. And he gives them his robe. The dirty rags of a far country are immediately replaced, and our righteousness, our dirty rags, God replaces them with his own. And God doesn't simply clean us up. No, he clothes us in his righteousness. He says not only get him a robe, he said put a ring on his finger. The ring, it would have represented authority and identity and family. That he's not just a servant. No, he's part of the family. The son isn't returning to work. No, he's being restored as a son. And the father wanted to make that known. He said, get some shoes for his feet. Servants often went barefooted in these days. He came home without shoes. Sons wore sandals. He's clothing them. And every gift is saying the same thing. You belong here. This is your home.

I am your father. And he says in verse number 23, bring hither the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry. See, the father doesn't just merely forgive. He celebrates. Because God doesn't just reluctantly tolerate sinners. No, he delights in restoring them. Let me just remind you this morning, maybe you've believed the lie that you've wandered too far. Maybe you've convinced yourself that God could never receive someone like you. But Luke 15 makes it pretty clear that's not how God operates.

That's not how he views you. No, he values you. He loves you. In fact, he's running to you today. And friend, I want you to see that's the heart of God. And at this point, if we were writing the story, this seems like a great ending. I mean, I love good endings like this. You kind of see it all and you're like, man, this is great. The son is home. The father's rejoicing. The feast has begun. Roll the credits.

But Jesus is none because there's another lost son. One who never left home for the far country, but his heart is just as far from the father. And that's what we see in verses 25 through 32. We see this last point. The father lovingly pursues those who think they don't need him.

[38:22] I hope you can see the picture now. We read verse 1 and 2. You know, the younger son is the tax collector. He's the publican. He's the sinner. But the Pharisees that are gathered around, you know who they are? They're the younger son. They're the older brother. They've kept all the rules.

Not one commandment is he broken, he says. See, while the younger brother was returning home, the older brother was busy working. You see the picture the Pharisees were always trying to do that.

Check all the boxes. Tithe and do all the things they're supposed to do and be good older brothers. But as he approached the house, he heard the music and the laughter and the celebration. He said, hey, what's going on in there? The servants all said, you're not going to believe this.

Your younger brother's home. And your dad was so excited. He said, kill the fatted calf. It's a party. Come on in. Verse 28, and he was angry. How many times over the last few chapters in the Gospel of Luke that when Jesus does something, when Jesus restores his soul, when Jesus saves a sinner, the Pharisees are mad as a hornet? Why do they deserve it? I do all the things. I follow all the rules. I check all the boxes. And he's so angry, he just throws himself a little pity party on the front porch. I'm sure he got the lawn chair and he put it right in the way so his dad could see him. You know how it is sometimes? Like, yeah, I'm out here. I've been here the whole time. See, the younger brother was outside of the house because of rebellion, but now the older brother stands outside because of his own self-righteousness. One broke all the rules, the other one trusted in the rules. But both of them were separated from the heart of the Father. See, isn't it amazing how easy sometimes it is to identify with the younger brother but completely miss the older brother inside of ourselves? I mean, sometimes we can, most of us never run to a far country per se.

[40:21] We're not going to go out and do these worldly, wicked, sinful things that be like, oh, I can't believe they do that. But it's easy to become critical and cold and convinced that we deserve God's favor because of our faithfulness. Hey, I was at church and I served faithfully and I know some Bible verses and we can know all those things and still have a heart that looks nothing like the Father. That's the danger Jesus is exposing. Just being close doesn't create a relationship.

You have to enter into one. So there in verse number 28, therefore came his father out and entreated him. It's just a, listen, it doesn't matter if it's a far country or the front porch, God's pursuing you. He's still coming after you. He pursues the rebellious. He pursues the religious. He loves the one who runs away and he loves the one who's standing outside. In verse 29, the older brother, man, he just unloads years of resentment. And we won't read the verses again for sake of time, but he says, I've served. I've never disobeyed. You never gave me. See, the younger brother was all about himself, but guess what? So is the older brother. It's the same problem, just from a different angle. He's talking like a servant who thinks he has earned something. He can't even call his brother his brother. He says, hey, your son, he's not even going to identify because why would you identify with a sinner like that? See, pride had destroyed his compassion. That's not his brother, that's his rival now. Why does he get the best seat? Why does he get the fatted calf? Why does he have the robe? I just want to remind us that's what self-righteousness does. It causes us to compare ourselves with others instead of rejoicing in God's grace. Instead of celebrating redemption, we can come resentful of it. Instead of rejoicing when prodigals come home, we wonder, why do they get so much attention? I've been doing good my whole life.

Because that's exactly what the Pharisees were doing here in Luke 13 and 14 and 15. See, the publicans and the sinners were coming to Jesus. Heaven was rejoicing, and the Pharisees were grumbling. See, Jesus isn't simply telling a story. He's exposing their heart. That's what's taking place here. And if we're not careful, we can become, church people can become older brothers real fast. We can forget what God has done for us. All the opportunities, all the blessings God has given, we can celebrate, we celebrate God's grace until it's extended to someone that we don't like, that

we struggle to love. We can become so focused on fairness that we forget that God never treated us fairly. I hope you understand what I'm saying there. Because if you know God's love, if you know God's love, has He saved you? That's not fair. That's grace. That's mercy. See, if God dealt with us fairly, none of us would be here. We don't stand before God because we've earned His favor. We stand before

Him because of His grace. For by grace are you saved through faith. It's not of works, it's a gift. The Father doesn't argue. He doesn't scold. He doesn't shame. He just said, listen, you've had me. I've been around. But you've got to decide if you want this. You've got to decide if you want to come in. Hey, the feast is going on. You're welcome to be a part of it. Are you going to sit out here and just pout about it? See, the older brother spent his whole life in his father's house, and yet he never learned to enjoy his father. He didn't have a relationship with his father.

[44:08] See, we see the same thread throughout the entire story. That the younger brother wanted the father's possessions. The older brother just wanted his rewards. But here's what God shows us. We should want Him. That's what's going to make the difference in your life. It's not what God can give you. It's not what He's going to bless you with. No, the fact that He wants to have a relationship with you is the greatest thing. And Jesus once again emphasizes that God finds joy in recovering the lost things.

Verse 32, it was meet that we should make merry and be glad. For this thy brother was dead and is alive again and was lost and disfound. And then Jesus just stops the story. No ending, no resolution, no answer. It's kind of one of those cliffhanger shows. Does He go in the house? Does He not?

We don't know. Because He was telling it right to the Pharisees. They had the opportunity to either accept Him or reject Him. And the same opportunity is for us today too. Maybe there's some here that you might be wandered far away. Here's the beautiful thing. God's...

Don't miss who Jesus wants us to see. He wants us to see His Father.

The Father that never stopped being the Father. See, God is patient and He's compassionate and He's gracious and He's waiting and He's running and He's pleading and He's restoring and He's rejoicing.

[46:01] That is the heart of God. And I hope you've experienced that. I hope you see it in your own life. He values the lost. He seeks the lost. He rejoices when the lost are found. But He's not going to force it.

He's going to allow you to choose. Listen, you cannot know Christ as your Savior. You can walk out this door today. That's your choice. But that's not what He wants. He joyfully wants to receive you into His family. Maybe He's pursuing you thinking, I'm good. I'm a good person. Good people don't go to heaven.

Saved people go to heaven. What an incredible God. What amazing grace. I want to leave you with this thought. The Father doesn't just forgive us and restore us and celebrate us. His greatest gift is that He welcomes us into a relationship with Himself. And every other blessing in your life will flow from that one blessing to know Him. Would you stand with your heads bowed?

Thank you.