

Luke 15:11–32

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[0 : 00] Again, that's Luke 15, 11-32. And he said, there was a young man who had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of my 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. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'how many of my father's hired servants 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 out 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 fattened 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 son 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 what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound. But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.

But he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

[2 : 29] And 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good morning.

Good morning. You ever have to take the long way home? Look, I don't care if you've ridden in a car with a father, a grandfather, or a father figure.

I can pretty much guarantee you that you have had to take the long way home. You know how it goes. We're just going to take a shortcut. Here we go again.

Often it is annoying. For those of you that are not fathers but are the ones driving, you just got to know this. We're the most annoyed ones. We just pretend like we know what we're doing.

[3 : 44] Often the long way home is annoying, but rarely are significant life lessons learned along the way. But there are other journeys where lessons are learned along the way.

Often lessons learned the hard way. What do we do when we have to face the long way home? What do we do when we're dealing with others who are taking the long way home? We've gone down the wrong path maybe further than us.

And have had to learn the hardest lessons. What would God do with such people? It's easy to despise them, but maybe there's a better way.

Jesus gives us an answer to these pressing questions by telling us this weird story of two sons. One who had to take the long way home.

[4 : 57] Why this text? Well, we're in a series. We're in a series. Jesus changes lives. And this one story explains how Jesus can change lives.

How Jesus has changed lives. And how to deal with those whose lives have been changed by Jesus. The story begins in verses 11 through 16 with the story of a guy getting what he wants. The story would have seemed strange from the start as Jesus told it. A son comes to his dad in verse 12 and says, Hey, why don't you go ahead and give me my inheritance? Now, everybody who would have been hearing this story would have been like, Wait a second. This is not normal. Usually, inheritance is conferred upon death. And while not like completely unknown during this time to ask for one's inheritance early, usually there's a good reason behind it. Here, there's no reason at all.

[6 : 11] He just wants what is ultimately coming to him now. Even more crazy, according to verse 12, is that the father does it.

I remember reading the story this week going like, I would have told my son, go to your room. And yet, the father does it. We don't know why.

What we do know is, the son gets it, and in the very next verse, verse 13, he splits quick, goes far away, and parties down.

The problem is, verse 14, famine hits quick. Life goes from delightful to disastrous.

You know the feeling? You get what you want, and everything falls to pieces. Sometimes, life just smacks us in the face due to factors outside of our control.

[7 : 22] But then there's those other times. When the factors outside of our control are compounded by our own foolishness. Welcome to this kid.

You in the middle of losing it all right now? Having gotten all you wanted? Life looks so good, but now you're stuck?

My son does what he can to get out of his position. He hires himself out for, let's just be honest, a rather terrible job.

I don't, look, I know some of you think that, like, pig, the only pigs you know of are, like, pigs in a blanket, which are delicious, by the way. Or you think that pork comes from a grocery store.

Now, I will be perfectly honest with you. One of the reasons I am more happy than ever to be a Christian is because Jesus said we could eat pigs, because it's the most glorious food on earth. But there's some nasty animals.

[8 : 36] But it's the work that exists, so he takes the job. And begins to work hard unto starvation. It gets so bad that he begins to wish, verse 16, that he could eat the food given to pigs.

This dude's in a bad way. He'd gotten everything that he wanted, and he ended up in a situation like this. Isn't it wild how far some of us have to run before we hit the end of the chain?

Some of you youngsters are like, I can't wait to run and see how long my chain is. Some of you have run a long ways and have begun to get suspicious.

I wonder how long this chain is. I hope you never have to find out how long your chain is. God, in his kindness, let some of us run for quite some time before we find ourselves at the limit.

This kid had absolutely found himself at his limit. There was no other options. There was no plan B. There was no social safety net. This guy had gone from comfortable at home to near death, far away.

[10 : 09] Question is, what will you do when you have gotten everything you ever wanted and it's gotten you nowhere?

You just got to keep reading. The story moves from getting what you want to finding what you need. He finds what he needs in verses 17 through 24.

I love the way the ESV puts it. The son's recognition of reality in verse 17. He came to himself.

That's a great line. He came to himself. He makes a decision in verse 18. I'm going to get up and I'm going to go to my father and he even plans out his speech.

Here's what I'm going to say when I get there. He gets up. He goes to his father just as he had planned but then his plans get ruined because something unexpected happens.

[11 : 23] We find it in verse 20. He arose, came to his father, so far so good, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Can you imagine having a father like that? Most of us don't. Most of us don't. To the fathers, let me be clear.

This is the goal. To be the kind of father that lovingly embraces the worst of their children when they've taken the long road back.

Why? There's only one good answer. I mean, let's be honest. If you're a Christian or not a Christian, it seems like a stupid move.

I'll tell you what I do. I'm going to wait until he gets here. I'm going to wait until he gets right here.

And I'm going to say simply, you look hungry. What do you have to say for yourself?

[12:45] I hope you've prepared a good speech. Why would a father act like this? Why should we act like this? There's only one good reason. Because that's exactly the way God acts towards us.

A son tries out his speech. He gets back to his plan, having had his plan interrupted, being lovingly embraced by this father.

He then goes, okay, hold on. Step back. I got something to say. I've been working on this. And he says the very speech that he planned to say in verse 21. He's not wrong.

He's absolutely right. What does it mean to come to yourself? It's to realize what the son has realized. I've screwed up six ways from Sunday.

I don't deserve anything. But would you just at least take me back somehow? The father's like, okay, you can stop that.

[14:06] Good speech, but I got something to tell you. Verse 22. Father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe and put it on him and bring a ring and put it on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate.

Why? Verse 24. For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. They began to celebrate.

It is party time. Thank you for what you had to say, but I've got something for you. Get dressed up. Kill that thing.

It's time to get the party on. What an amazing response. This kid had gone from assumed dead to alive.

What a wonderful journey. This long way back. Hard lessons were learned along the way, but now he's back and everything is great.

[15:10] Can you imagine being invited to this party? Like, bro, we thought you were dead. His dad's like, I know, me too. Would have been quite the festivities.

So, let's just ask the question. What the heck is this story doing in the Bible? I mean, is it just like a cute and compelling story that's supposed to guilt the fathers in this room to do a little bit better tomorrow?

Not exactly. As we learned in adult ed over the last few months, in order to understand these stories of Jesus called parables, you've got to figure out what's going on around the parable in order to begin to understand why would Jesus tell a story like this?

Begin with the simple question. Who's Jesus even talking to? I mean, you know, Marjorie just lights up into this thing and starts reading in the middle of this. I didn't explain it at the beginning.

That was on purpose. Who's he talking to? You actually have to go back to the beginning of the chapter. Chapter 15, beginning in verse 1. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

[16:31] And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. So Jesus told them a parable.

The religious authorities of the day are the story target. Now, this little line of theirs might sound vaguely familiar if you've been in this series in Luke.

I mean, it kicked off in the Levi story. They said the same thing in chapter 5. And they say it again in chapter 7. These dudes are on repeat.

They just show up and they're like, We don't understand why you eat with tax collectors and sinners. You're gross. Why are you doing that? Jesus answered them multiple times and he just answers them again. He's like, Well, you didn't get it the first few times, so let me tell you a few stories.

What comes before our parable? Well, two other parables. One about looking for a lost sheep. Another about looking for a lost coin. In both cases, it ends the same.

[17:39] Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep coin that was lost. In our story, there's a losing and finding of a son.

In verse 24, he was lost and is found, and they began to celebrate. You might go, Okay, that's interesting. But why is Jesus sharing a set of stories with religious experts of the day who are upset that he is spending time with sinners?

Good question. Here's the answer. Because this text is meant to teach us this, that forgiveness for the worst of us is good news for all of us.

Do you believe that? Like, listen, there's only two groups of people in here. The worst of us and everybody else.

But it doesn't matter who you are this morning because forgiveness for the worst of us is good news for all of us. Jesus loves to joyfully embrace all who come to him however long the way home.

[19 : 05] What does it look like to make your way home? It's to come to yourself. It's to go, Whoa, I am way out here on the end of nowhere. I've squandered it all.

Maybe he'd take me back if I go back to him. Realizing that what you have isn't worth it and finding everything you need in Jesus.

What does he have? Kind of hard to answer that question because it would take me way too long. Let's put it this way. He's got it all.

What you looking for? He's got it. Loving forgiveness for all who would come to him. How would we know something like this?

I mean, shoot, I don't even have to say it. Just remember back to what Adam said in his testimony. That crazy Jesus guy dies in our place. It's to realize, Oh, I am way out in the end of nowhere.

[20 : 08] Desire not only to starve but hang on a cross and yet Jesus does it in my place. Proves it through the resurrection and then says, All you got to do is come to yourself and make your way home.

One wise person told me once, Sometimes you just got to go home. So friends, let me ask you a question. You come home?

If this father accepts this kind of son, then I guarantee you that Jesus would accept somebody like you. You're like, Man, I think I understand what you're talking about but I'm not yet a Christian.

I don't quite understand. I have so many questions that I would like to ask. Catch me after service because while I am looking forward to my Father's Day nap, I'll stick around and talk to you until everybody gets home.

If you have come to Jesus, then you ought to be so encouraged because there's nothing better than being embraced by Jesus in the same way that this father embraces this son.

[21 : 30] Never stop wondering at the amazing reality that Jesus would embrace somebody like you because while you might not be the worst of us, let's be honest, you're not that great.

At the same time that you ought to be encouraged, you should also watch out. Remember that forgiveness for the worst of us is good news for all of us and also remember the opening line of this parable.

There was a man who had two sons. We've seen the one who had to take the long way home but what about that other one?

We've seen the peril of getting what you want. We've seen the joy of finding what you need. this parable ends talking about that other son.

Verses 25 through 32. We see a man fighting with unfairness. I know this parable is classically called the prodigal son.

[22 : 53] It's a terrible title for this parable. I can only imagine being the older son being like, dude, you left me completely out. And also, this isn't about the son.

It's about the compassion of the father. If you've got a pen, just scribble it out. I mean, you know, even if you have a pew Bible, just scribble it out.

The parable of the compassionate father. He came from the field. no doubt weary from a long day of work.

And in verses 25 through 27 as the camera pans to the second son, we see him show up and hear a sound and go, oh, oh, do you know what's going on?

It sounds like there's a party. Why? Why? He learns that there's indeed a party going on for his loser brother.

[24 : 04] He refuses to join the party. I'm not going to that mess. Are you kidding me? I'm just going to sit outside. Incredibly, the father comes and entreats him to come in.

The language right there in 28. His father came out and entreated him. Once again, the compassion of the father. I would have stood at the door of the party and been like, are you serious?

Quit your crying. Look at you. You're all sweaty and dirty. Go take a shower. Change your clothes. Get on the dance floor. No, he comes out and entreats him.

The older son is clearly upset. Verses 28 and 29. But he answered his father, look, these many years I have served you and I have never disobeyed your command and you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours, not this brother of mine, when this son of yours came who devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

[25 : 23] It just isn't fair. It's always great, right? When you get something and you're super excited about what you got until somebody else gets something better than what you got.

I don't care how old you are, I know we got some little kids in the room. You get a piece of cake and you're like, this is the greatest day of my life. I got cake.

And you show your sister your cake. I got some cake. Your sister goes, nice cake. And then as you're staring at your sister, you don't see your mom come around the corner and give your sister a piece of cake.

And then you look at your cake and you look at her cake and you look at your cake. You were happy with your cake until you saw her cake. Because for some sick reason, you're one of those people that loves frosting. I don't understand you people at all, but she got the corner piece with more frosting.

You still have cake. You have all the cake. But all of a sudden, you're upset with your cake because somebody else got cake. Better cake than you.

[26 : 39] I was doing everything. your son gets a party. The son's words are revealing.

They show that the son did not serve the father out of love but simple repayment. I deserve more.

Again, I can only imagine the father going like, do you want me to repeat back to you the words that are coming out of your mouth?

No. father. Here's the crazy thing. The older son hadn't lost anything.

His foolish brother who had come to himself had returned and simply gained. Again, forgiveness for the worst of us is good news for all of us. Listen, here's the crazy thing about Christianity in case you didn't know.

Nobody has to lose in order for everybody to win. Notice the kindness of the father once again.

[27 : 43] I wish I could have seen his face. Verse 31, And 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. Jesus is talking to Pharisees, religious experts.

They're upset at kindness being shown to the worst kind of people. And Jesus is saying, look, you don't have to lose anything, just join the party.

You may not want to claim that brother, as your brother, but he's your brother whether you like it or not.

In other words, son, just chill out, because forgiveness for the worst of us is good news for you.

[28 : 51] So, how will you respond to the forgiveness found in Jesus for all kinds of people, including the worst kinds of people? You're going to get grumpy or you're going to join the party?

Be clear. The party is going on. That's not the question. The only question is, you're going to party with everybody else or not? You're going to party with everybody else or not? Now, here's the thing. We don't understand, we don't know, we don't learn of Pharisees' reaction to this immediately. Just keep reading.

Chapter 16, verse 1, he also said to the disciples, he's moving on. In other words, Jesus doesn't necessarily drop the mic, he simply hands it to the Pharisees and goes, I'll see you later, I've got another group of people to talk to.

The decision's yours, stay out there or join the party. But actually, you and I don't need to know the way the Pharisees responded.

[30 : 08] Here's a brief survey of how they responded in the rest of the book. They would keep being upset that Jesus would show forgiveness to the wrong kinds of people, would never join the party, always stay outside, and hang Jesus on the cross, which is the way you and I actually get in.

But the question isn't primarily about the Pharisees, it's about you, and it's about me. How will we respond when forgiveness is given to the worst kinds of people?

join the party. The only question is this, will you take the long road home?

And if you've already taken the long road home, then will you join the party when others do the same?

Pray. Lord, we thank you for this strange little story about two very different sons and their equally compassionate father.

[31 : 29] God, I pray for those who have gotten what they wanted and are finding that it has not satisfied. Would you help them to come to themselves and to take the long way home?

Knowing that Jesus is willing and able to forgive, who will not only wait till we get home, but run to meet us along the way.

I pray for those who have taken the long way home, who joined the party and are excited to be in it. Would you help us to join the other parties too? Do not be upset when even the worst of us receive forgiveness.

forgiveness. Would we remember forever that forgiveness for even the worst of us is good news for all of us?

[32 : 45] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.