

Prodigal God

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[0:00] Okay, today's sermon is the second of four sermons in a series called Gospel Training. We're going to be in Luke chapter 15. The whole time I'm going to go verse by verse through! Section of Luke 15. So if you want to pull out your Bibles and follow along with me, you certainly can.

And we're going to primarily be in Luke 15, 11 to 32, but we're going to start with verse 1 so we see the context here. The title of my sermon today is Gospel Identity or Prodigal God. Gospel Identity or Prodigal God. All right, in Luke chapter 15 verse 1, we see the audience that he's speaking to. He's going to tell three different parables in Luke 15, and we want to first see who he's talking to because it'll give us a clue as to what he's saying and why he's saying it. So Luke 15, 1 to 2 says, Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him, and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. Okay, so that's the, this is the backdrop of Luke 15. We got two groups of people. We got the tax collectors and the sinners, so the unrighteous, and then we got the Pharisees and the scribes. You might describe them as the self-righteous. Okay, we got the unrighteous, the self-righteous, and the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes, they're grumbling. What are they saying? They're saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them, with the kind of, you can almost hear the disgust in their voice as they're saying it.

All right? So you got three different parables with one theme. The theme you have in all three parables, you got the parables of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and then the parable of the lost son. And thematically, you see joy in heaven over repentant sinners in all three of these. All right? So we're gonna, so let's look, so Luke 15, 7, the first one, it says, So I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. And then Luke 15, 10, in the second parable, he says, So I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And then it brings us to the third parable. This is where we're going to be having our focus this morning, or we're going to go through. So we'll start in verse 11 of Luke 15. Parable of the, what most people would call the parable, parable of the prodigal son. I think it might, in some ways, might be better titled the parable of the prodigal God.

[2:30] The word prodigal means waste. Okay? And so it's looking at the son and say, Oh, look at how he was wasteful. And I think in the same way, they would probably look at God, and we'll see this in a second and say, Oh, he's, he's wasting his efforts. He's wasting his lavish grace. So we'll start with Luke verse 15, 11 says, remember, it says there was a man who had two sons. There was a man who had two sons. So this story is about two sons. And let's remember the audience. There's the self righteous who are listening and the unrighteous. And then the parable is about two sons. So he's speaking to two different groups of people. And then also the parable is about two sons. That's significant. Okay. So verse 12, the younger of them said to his father, father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me. And he divided his property between them. Okay. So verse 12, we just said, uh, so middle Eastern culture is a shame and honor culture. All right. Uh, John MacArthur tells a story when he was preaching on the same text, he tells the story of a woman in the middle

East who was a Muslim who was converted to Christianity. And when the family found out about it, they were so upset that their daughter would dishonor the family by becoming a Christian, that they couldn't see her. They couldn't talk to her. They wouldn't even go home to her. When they found out that she had become a Christian, they wouldn't even enter the house with her in it because they could not face such dishonor to that level. Okay. In fact, they ended up sending one of the relatives to the house to beat her. And they think to actually kill her. And you might say, why would they do such a thing? Why would their own daughter, why would they send a family member to go to her

and beat her, even kill her? Now you have to understand this is middle Eastern culture. This is shame and honor culture. The shame that was brought on this Muslim family to be able, because someone became a Christian, it can't be tolerated. And so they sent this relative to kill this, this daughter.

Someone walked in, in the middle of the beating and was able to rescue her. And she was able to come to the States and she was okay. But this kind of tells the story of that kind of shame and honor culture. Uh, dishonor and honor were very, very big in middle Eastern cultures, uh, still are. Okay. And so you have this story that he tells and says, the younger said to his father, father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me. And he divided this property among them. Now, let me ask you the question. When do you get an inheritance? Is it when your, your parents are alive or is it typically when they die? It's typically when they die. Okay. You don't get your inheritance before the father is dead. And so essentially what he was saying by saying, while the father's alive, him saying, give me my inheritance. He's basically saying, I wish you were dead. I wish you were dead. Now, just him asking this is, this is dishonoring that, that a son would ask a father for his inheritance while he's still alive. This is dishonoring. Okay. Those listening would say, Oh my goodness. What, what kind of son is this? And then on top of that, the father rewards the dishonor. The father actually gives him his share. So the oldest son would have got a double portion.

The younger son would have got the other portion. So that would have been one third of his assets. Okay. He would be giving to his son. So on top of first of all, they're saying, Oh my goodness, I can't believe the son would be so dishonoring to the father by doing this. And then secondly, they'd say, Oh, and the father actually answered his request and gave it to him. What is he doing?

[6:18] How would he, why would he reward this dishonor? This is, this is a disgrace. He rewards the dishonor. Verse 13 starts off with not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey.

So you got to remember, it's not like the inheritance was just all in cash. It's not like the father, the father's still alive. So most of what he owns is probably not in cash. It's in assets. It's in property, especially back then it would have been in property or maybe even animals.

Okay. And so when it says not many days later, he goes with his inheritance, that would tell you that he probably liquidated this stuff pretty fast. And to liquidate these things fast, what would you have to do? You would have to sell it for less than it's worth. Again, what is that like? Dishonor.

The father worked so hard to build this inheritance to give to his son. The son asks for it early and then liquidates it quickly. Dishonor. Dishonor. Not many days later speaks of a possible liquidation. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country. And there he squandered his property and reckless living. He journeys into a far country.

Remember, these are Jews. Jews must marry among themselves. The Jews are very much have this allegiance and this pride in their Jewish culture. The Bible has strict rules about them, how they interact with the Gentiles. And especially when it comes to marriage and such and sexual relations. And what does this son do? Okay. Not only does he ask for the inheritance, not only does he liquidate it quickly, but he goes to a foreign country. He goes to the Gentiles and he spends it there. He spends it on that. And what does he spend it on? He spends it on reckless living and prostitutes. Verse 30 speaks of the specifics of prostitutes. Okay. So now he's spending this on prostitutes and reckless living. Again, height of dishonor. Like if you're going to, you're going to pick a story and depict someone who would be dishonorable, this son, it just keeps ratcheting it up. Oh, now he's going to the Gentiles. Oh, now he's spending all this on reckless living. Now he's spending it on prostitutes. This son is over the top. He squandered his property and reckless living. Squandered means waste. This is where we get the term, the prodigal son. Verse 14 says, and then when he had spent everything, so it's not that he was just spending some of it. He spent it all. He's wasted his father's entire inheritance. When he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. Okay. Now remember, he's speaking to the self-righteous and unrighteous. So the self-righteous, I got to be thinking, this guy is the worst. This is shame off the charts. This is a level of dishonor. They got to be like elbowing each other and saying, this is ridiculous. Who is this kid? This kid doesn't even deserve to live at this height of dishonor. This is a travesty. And the unrighteous are probably thinking, I can relate to this guy. I can relate to this guy. I've wasted my life. I've given myself to sexual morality. I've squandered the things that have been given to me. Jesus is speaking to these two groups. Verse 15, it gets worse. Verse 15, it gets

worse. So this famine comes. He began to be in need. Verse 15 says, so he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his field to feed what? Pigs. Pigs. Sent him in the field to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything. At this point, I got to believe that the listeners are just like, oh, okay. I mean, come on. Really? Pigs? For a Jew? He's feeding pigs?

[10:24] Like, if you know, they know the law. Deuteronomy 14.8 says, you're not even supposed to touch a pig. Okay? This isn't an unclean animal. You're not even supposed to touch a pig. And now this guy, that's his job? He's feeding pigs. And not only that, he longs to be fed with the pods that the pigs eat. This is next level. Jesus is painting. This is really important. Jesus is painting the picture of the worst possible sinner. Okay? He's painting the picture because not only is he feeding the pigs, but he wants to eat what the pigs are eating. Essentially, he's becoming a pig.

He's becoming unclean in the worst sense of it. I mean, I would imagine that some of these listeners are just like, I don't even know I can listen to this anymore. This is so over the top, the picture of the worst possible sinner in that culture. This is the picture Jesus is painting. Okay? This is, you know, Romans 7.13 talks about our sin being sinful beyond measure. Jesus is trying to paint a picture of the wickedness and the disgusting nature of our sin. And he's doing it for a Jewish audience.

He's doing it for a self-righteous group of people, these tax collectors and scribes. And he's painting a very vivid picture. This is helpful to us because he can answer the question, which is a very important question. What does God do with the worst sinner?

What does God do with the worst sinner? Why is that relevant? Because that's us. That's us. I want to know what God does with the worst sinner because that's what he does with me. And I'd say, well, I'm not the worst sinner. You got something coming to you then if you don't understand that. Like you're missing the point. You're missing the point. If you're the one saying, oh, this guy, and you're not saying, oh, this guy, me, then you're missing something here.

This is answering the question, what does God do with the worst sinner? We need to know that because that's us. That's us. Verse 16 says, no one gave him anything. Okay? So he's destitute now.

[12:36] He's starving. It's so bad. He wants to eat pig food and no one's given him anything. In verse 16, he was allowing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything. Verse 17, 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've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. Okay? So what's, what's going on here? What does he say in verse 17?

When he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired hands? Who does he begin thinking about? He begins thinking about his father. He begins thinking about his father. He begins thinking of the kindness of his father. Why is this significant? Romans two, verse four, what leads a person to repentance? God's kindness leads us to repentance. And he begins thinking of the kindness of his father. And he begins to turn. He begins to turn. But before we're going to commend this guy, let's take a look at his motives. Let's look at what he's saying here. He says, how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger. Okay? So what's this, what's the first, uh, what's the first motive here? It seems like they're, they're mixed. The first motive here is hunger. His first motive isn't, oh my goodness, I have sinned against God. I'm such a wicked sinner. His first motive is, I am so hungry. Surely my father was a good man. He will at least treat me like one of his servants or slaves and I can get food there. His motive is hunger. His first motive is hunger. For all those who think, oh, there's, there's only hope for me unless I have all my decks in a row and all my motives right. The prodigal comes back with mixed motives. It's second after that, that he says, father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. His first motive though is a selfish motive. His first motive is thinking about him, not thinking about God.

This first motive is I'm hungry. Okay? The worst sinner on top of the fact of being painted as the worst sinner, the worst sinner also has bad motives. He has bad motives. And I want you to remember this rehearsed speech. He's, he's telling his rehearsed speech here. This is going to be significant later when he gives the speech to his dad. Look at what he says there and take note of it and remember this when we get to the part when he, when he sees his father. Okay? But there's a really another important thing in this little speech he gives. Verse 19, he says, I am not, I'm, I'm no

longer worthy to be called your son.

Treat me as one of your hired servants. This points to one of the central points of this whole parable. Okay? Let me ask you the question, where does our worth come from? Where does your worth come from?

Does it come by what you do? Does it, does it, is it taken from you by what you've done? Do you get it because you did good things? Do you lose it because you've got done bad things?

[15:51] Does your worth come from what you do or what you have, what you have done or what you haven't done? Are you defined? Is there identity in what you do? Well, this younger son says, I am no longer worthy.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt like when you come before the Lord, you come on a Sunday, even to sing worship songs, you ever felt like I'm not worthy to sing this song? I haven't spent enough time with Jesus. I haven't been nice enough to the people in my life. I haven't done a good job in my family with my spouse or with my kids. I lost my temper. I did this. I did that. I, I haven't prayed enough, read enough, repented enough. I haven't done enough. I am not worthy. Have you ever felt under condemnation? Have you ever come into a time of worship or a time where you were going to seek the Lord and you are under condemnation? You're feeling less than you're feeling unworthy. And you can relate to this son. He says, because of what I've done, I'm no longer worthy. He defined his worth by the bad things that he had done. Can you relate? Have you ever done this? Have you ever defined yourself by the bad things that you've done? Are any of you even right now defining yourself today by the bad things you've done? Are you walking in a little sheepish? Are you walking in a little less confident because you are defined by the bad things that you've done?

This is what the younger son was doing. And so he says, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Where does your sense of worth come from? Verse 19 is setting up the, what I would say is the best verse of this whole story. Verse 20.

So he says, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. He's rehearsing his speech. Verse 20. 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. Wow.

This verse is arguably one of my favorite verses in all of scripture. There's so much here. It says, he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, the fact that he was a long way off says something about the father. Okay. The only way you can see someone a long way off is if you're looking for him. You don't see someone a long way off unless you're waiting and looking and longing for your son to come home. You hear this. This is Micah 7, 18 in the NIV that God delights to show mercy. This is Isaiah 30, 18 in the NIV that he longs to be gracious to you. Do you know your father as someone who delights to be merciful to you and longs to be gracious to you? Do you see a father in your life, your heavenly father, who when you're sinning, he is waiting there longing for you to return, looking for you while he was a long way off, it says. While he was a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion. Compassion comes from two root words. Passion means to suffer.

[18:52] Come means with. Okay. This is, this is, this is a word that the Greek word in here refers to a level of compassion that's at the gut level that it, it, it, it upsets your innards. This is the kind of compassion he was feeling. He sees him from a long way off and he's moved in his bowels. He's moved in his inner being and sees him and he has compassion over his son. His first inclination is compassion.

It's not condemnation. It's not rejection. It's not pushing away. It's not running away. It's not standing there stoic. His first inclination when he sees him from a long way off is compassion.

His compassion. And what does he do? It says he ran and embraced him and kissed him. He ran and embraced him and kissed him. He's eager. He's running. He runs to him. He embraced him and he kissed him.

What's significant about the father running? Now remember, this is Middle Eastern culture. Middle Eastern older men do not show any skin. Like they're not showing their legs. That would be totally dishonoring. But remember, they're wearing like a tunic. Maybe a woman would be able to relate to this a little better. If you try to run in a dress, what do you need to do first? You have to pull it up or you're going to trip. You pull up your dress and you run. A man with a tunic on, if he's going to run, there's only one way to do it or he will trip over that tunic. He has to pull it up.

He has to show his legs. Why is that significant? Because remember, in Middle Eastern culture, anybody in that city knows what this son has done. And as soon as they would see him, all they would do is shame. This man dishonored you. This son dishonored you. He deserves to be punished. He may even deserve to be beaten. In that culture, he may have even been beaten for his sin in front of everyone and the father would watch. In order to restore the father's honor, the shame would have been glaring on the son. Him coming back, he knows this because he's already recited the speech. The shame is already on him and it would be put on him in greater measure by the city, the village that he was coming back to. But before that can happen, the father takes the shame that should have been on him. And by lifting his legs and running to him, the shame gets put on the father.

[21:12] Do you see this? Is this not just like God? Is this not just like the father revealed through the son on the cross when he took our shame and took it on himself? This is your heavenly father.

Rather than let the shame fall on the son, he reverses it and takes the shame on himself and runs to him as a Middle Eastern older man. He takes the shame upon himself and he runs to the son. That's a big deal. The dishonor of leg exposure is a shame exchange. He's preempting the ridicule. Sometimes they would even publicly flog the son when he would come back. And people might beat him and spit on him.

There would need to be restitution to restore the father's honor. But instead, he runs to him and he's embraced him and he kisses him. Other versions say he threw his arms around him and he's kissing him.

Okay. That word kiss in the Greek is not, because of the prefix on it, is not just one kiss. It's that he keeps kissing him.

[22:16] He keeps kissing him. He jumped, lunges at him, hugs him, and keeps kissing him. Okay. Now, the kiss in Middle Eastern culture is also significant. What does it mean? It means full restoration. It means full restoration.

Again, the preempting of the shame and the punishment that would be on the son. At that moment, when he embraces him and he kisses him, it's over. He is now restoring him in front of whoever might be watching. Okay. The kiss means full reconciliation.

He's receiving him back into the family and he's kissing him again and again. How does God treat sinners? What do you believe about God in your sin? Do you believe the gospel?

This is so important here. When you come to God in your sin, how do you see the father? How do you see the father? What do you believe that he does when you come to him in your sin?

Do you see him as the father of the story? Do you see him running to you? Do you see him seeing you from a long way off? Do you see him embracing you and continually kissing you, receiving you back?

[23:24] Is that the father that you know? That is your father. That is the father of the Bible. That is God the father. That is real. That is true. It doesn't matter what your earthly father does. It doesn't matter the amount of times you've been missed, that the father has been misrepresented through the ones who share the same name.

God the father is not like your father. He's different. He's different. And in your sin, he runs to you. He runs to you. And he embraces you. And he kisses you. And he kisses you again and again.

This is how God treats sinners. Verse 21. Verse 22.

Hold on. Is that the full speech? Do you remember from the other verses? Did he get through the full speech? He didn't. He didn't get through the whole speech. The father cut him off. The father didn't let him.

The father didn't let him say, I want to be like your servant. Uh-uh. It's not happening. God the father is not having any of that. He cuts him off. He cuts him off. He doesn't get to finish the rehearsed speech. And he says, 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. The best robe was typically reserved for the firstborn son's wedding, representing the father's honor. Essentially, he's saying, put the honor on my son. Cover his shame with my honor. Cover his shame with my honor. Do you see this? Again, this is the wayward son. This is the wasteful prodigal son who just wasted a third of his inheritance on prostitutes and wild living and pig feeding. I mean, he probably still smells like pigs. I don't know if you've ever driven by a pig farm. When I lived in Wisconsin, I drove by them often. They smell really bad. Really bad. This guy probably smells bad. And he's throwing his best. It's often the best robe is this is the father's robe. And he's putting the father's honor over this son.

[25:43] Puts on the robe and he puts on the ring. What does the ring represent? The ring was probably the signet ring. This is representing the father's authority. It's not like he's a second class son.

It's like, all right, son, you can come back. You're tolerable now. Some people, when they think of God and they think of God in Christ Jesus, they say, oh, the reconciliation that happened means I'm now tolerable. I'm now let in. The arms are crossed. God's arms are crossed. He's like, okay, you can come in, but just by the skin of your teeth, barely. This is not the story. This is not the picture we see in the Bible. He's not just seeing him as tolerable. He puts the robe on him. He gives the ring. He restores his authority and he puts shoes on his feet. Why is that significant? Well, who's barefoot in that culture? Servants and slaves. Slaves were, slaves were barefoot, not a son. A son is not barefoot.

Significant that he puts shoes on him because again, no son of mine is not going to be wearing shoes. He's not a slave. He's not a servant. Not only did I not even let him finish his speech, I will not even let him think that way because I'm putting shoes on his feet. I'm putting shoes on his feet. Verse 23 says, bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. Now, know that the fattened calf, this isn't like your typical lunch, okay? The fattened calf would feed the village. They had to be like, kill the fattened calf. What's going on? Who's coming over? Like, we can't eat all this. I mean, if you feed, if you kill the fattened calf, we're feeding a lot of people. This, this is now, again, remember the, the people that they're going to be feeding, these would be the people who would typically shame the son. No, no, no, no, no. It's a total reversal. Kill the fattened calf. We're having a party. We're having a party. Invite everybody, right? That's, that's, that's basically what this is saying. That's, let's eat and celebrate. That's what, that's when you kill the fattened calf. You do that when you're going to eat and celebrate and not just a small celebration. You want to do a small celebration? You're killing the goat. The older son brings this up later. He says, I never even got a goat. You're killing the fattened calf. This is not just a little party. This is a big party. Okay? So he's saying, we're having a big party. We're having a big party. How do you view God when you've sinned? God ran toward the unworthy and clothed them in what he didn't earn. He ran toward the unworthy, clothed them what he didn't earn. Verse 24, for this, my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found and they began to celebrate. Not only was he, when they, this isn't just figurative language. In that culture, the love, again, remember the love of dishonor. If a son would dishonor the father in that way, sometimes in that culture, they would literally have a funeral for him as if the son was dead, as if the son was lost. If this, the son has nothing more to do with me.

[28:46] They would literally have a funeral and they would mourn the loss of the son while he was alive. So when he's saying my son was dead and is alive again, to them in this culture, it's literally like a resurrection as if my son was gone and he's back from the dead. This is what they're saying.

He was lost and is found and they began to celebrate. They began to celebrate. Amazing. Amazing. Do you have more faith in your sin to condemn you or your Savior to forgive you? Let me ask you again.

Do you have more faith in your sin to condemn you or more faith in your Savior to forgive you? This parable is about two sons defining themselves by what they do. You are not what you do. Listen to me this morning. Some of you really need to hear this. You are not what you do. You are what you never could do in Christ Jesus. You're justified. You're justified. You're not what you do. You're what you could never do.

Verse 21. Remember, he said, I am no longer worthy. Worth determined by what he did or didn't do. This is the story of this parable, which brings us to the next part. Now he goes to the oldest. Now we go to the elder son, right? The elder son. Verse 25.

Now his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. Okay? So he's describing the older son. The first thing he says is the older son is where? He's in the field. Doing what? He's working. What do you do in the field? He's working. He's responsible.

[30:23] The older son isn't wasting. The older son is diligent. He's working. Everybody else is celebrating. Where's the older son? Doing what older sons do, right? Working, being responsible. The stereotypical older son, responsible son. The older son was in the field. As he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. Now remember, I love that it says he heard music and dancing. Hearing music is obvious, right? Music is always heard. You can't always hear dancing, though. If you can hear dancing, they're dancing, right? If they hear dancing, I'm thinking

these guys are getting down. Like, this is a celebration. So I kind of like that little detail in there that he heard music and dancing. He heard these guys are really going after it. These guys are celebrating what is going on here. Okay? Verse 26, 27. 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. Okay? So his brother finds out. Prodigal son has returned. Verse 28, but he was angry and refused to go in. Again, the picture, remember the beginning of the story in Luke 15? It says that they were grumbling because Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. You can just hear the disdain in their voice. You can hear the same disdain in the older son's voice, right? He was angry and refused to go in. So older son's having a little pity party. Older son is having an adult tantrum here. He refuses to go in. And I love this verse. This is probably the second best, my favorite in this whole story. His father came out and entreated him.

The father came to both sons. Do you see this? The sinning son, the one who's off the charts, shamed son, the father runs to him. He doesn't wait for the son to get to him. He runs to him. What about the other son? Also sinful, the self-righteous son, the son who doesn't see his sin. The self-righteous son, the father also goes to him. He doesn't just push him off. Oh, you arrogant, self-righteous son. No, he entreats him. He entreats him. The father comes to both sons. He doesn't react to his sons. Your earthly father probably reacted to you. We as earthly fathers tend to react. Your heavenly father does not react. He doesn't, he's not reacting to things outside of himself. He's God and not man. All right. He initiates out of his loving character. He doesn't react to our unloving, sinful character. He is totally other. He is holy. He initiates out of his loving character. It's Romans 5, 8. God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The product, the story of the prodigal in Luke 15 shows God loving the unrighteous sinner and the self-righteous sinner. So whatever camp you find yourself, whether you are the unrighteous or the self-righteous, or you realize what's probably true, that I am both sons.

Know that the father comes to you both. Father comes to you both. He runs to the unrighteous son. He entreats the older son. And let's listen to what he has to say.

[33:52] Okay. So what's the older son's speech? Verse 29. So after it says, his father came out and treated him, but he answered his father, look. Now, hold on a second. When you're talking to dad and you say, look, what is this? Disrespect, shame. This is dishonor. The older son now is taking his turn to dishonor the father. He says, look. He didn't say father. He says, look. Look. It's just bleeding with disrespect, right? Dishonor. Look, these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command. You never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

Do you hear the self-righteousness in this? This word served here that he uses in the Greek is specifically about serving as a slave, not as a son.

It's revealing. He's been serving. He's been serving diligently. But what was he serving for? He was serving to get. It was transactional. Listen, if your Christianity is transactional, you are missing the whole deal. You do not serve to get. You serve because you've gotten.

You don't serve to get. Nothing you could do is good enough. It's never good enough. And maybe that's why sometimes you're so angry because you know it deep down in your soul that it's true. That no matter how hard I try, no matter how hard I try to be right, no matter how hard I try to do what's right and be the one who's not like the wasteful son, who's not like all these people who have wasted so much of what God's given, I'm the one doing what's right. Don't you see, God? Look.

[35:37] Look at me. Again, he's saying, look at me. His focus is totally off. It's on himself. Father, the self-righteous person doesn't say, look at Jesus. Look at God. Look what he's done.

The self-righteous person says, look at me. Look at me. Look what I've done. I've done this and you haven't seen it. I deserve more than this. I deserve to be healed. I deserve that job. I deserve people to treat me better. I deserve a better spouse. I deserve this. I deserve to have a spouse. I deserve all these things. Can't you see what I've done for you? This is what the older son says. Look.

The gospel doesn't define us by what we do, but rather by what Jesus has done. Rather by what Jesus has done. Do you hear the language here? Verse 30 says, but when this son of yours came, this son of yours, what does that mean? This is his brother. What do you mean this son of yours? Disassociation. Do you hear that? Condescension. This son of yours, who I still want to have nothing to do with it. I can't believe that you would have, that you would dishonor the family by doing

this with this son. Who do you think you are? That's essentially what you can just hear in the older son.

Just disrespecting them. This son of yours came. He has devoured your property with prostitutes. You killed a fattened calf for him. So he's obviously upset. He sees this as an unjust transaction. The older son is transactional. Religion traffics in transactions. Religion says, I do the right things. I get the right rewards. Grace says, you've never done enough. You never will do enough. And all that you do fall short day in and day out. There's only one good. There's only one who's done enough.

[37:27] There's only one sinless sacrifice. There's only one. His name is Jesus. And he paid your price. He took your punishment. He died your death. And he rose from the grave to say, death has been swallowed in victory. And that's who we trust. We don't trust in our self-righteousness. But the older son was trusting in his own self-righteousness. And he rebuked the father. He said, he's devoured your property with prostitutes. He thought this was an unjust tract action. That he was getting the raw end of the deal, so to speak. One of the reasons we're so mortified and shocked by other people's sins is because we're not mortified and shocked enough by our own.

You find yourself condescending someone and looking down on someone just like this older son is. I got news for you. I know why it is. It's because you are not shocked enough by your own sin. You think somehow, some way, you're better. And you're not. You're wrong. You're wrong. Not true. Is unrighteousness worse than self-righteousness? They're both sins. They're both infinitely wicked before an infinitely holy God. And we should be broken over our self-righteousness as much, if not more so, than our unrighteousness. Because self-righteousness is a slap in the face. It says, God, I don't need you. I'm fine on my own. I don't need you. I've got this. Verse 31.

And he said to him, what does he call him? Son. Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. Why are you trying to pay for something you could never pay for? Why are you fighting and working for something that's already yours? Why are you fighting for something that's already yours? Don't you know that all that I have is yours? Why are you striving? Why are you feeling ripped off? Yeah, I'm not having a party for you because you already have all, you have everything. And you've always been with me. This son was lost.

You've been with me the whole time. Don't you understand, son? Son, you're acting like a slave in the house. You're acting like an orphan. You're not an orphan. You're not a slave. You're my son.

[39:54] Not an orphan. Not a slave. You're my son. Verse 32. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this, your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. One of the reasons we can't celebrate sinners coming to Christ is because we've never truly celebrated Christ saving us.

If you have a hard time celebrating someone coming to Christ, you probably have an experience what you need to experience in the power and the joy of God saving you. And you're still working for your salvation. You're treating God like a boss, like a transactional boss that needs to give you stuff because you did things for him. This story is a prophetic story. The father in this story is God. The younger son is the tax collector and sinners. The older son is the Pharisees and the scribes. They were so upset about the dishonor. They thought that Jesus was dishonoring God. They thought this picture of God was dishonoring God. They were so zealous for God that they needed to kill Jesus to honor God. Just like that story I told in the beginning that MacArthur told.

Do you see why they crucified him? See why they yelled blasphemy? You see why they yelled crucify him? If this person is claiming to be God, the picture of God he is depicting, eating with tax collector sinners, this is so dishonoring the God we've served all these years. There's only one right thing to do to this man. Crucify him. Crucify him. That's why they crucified him. It says in John 16 verse 2, Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. They thought they were doing a service to God by killing Jesus. And that's what the self-righteous does. So here you have what I would say is the greatest story ever told. I don't know of a greater story ever written in this story. Two sons approaching their father based on their works.

[42:01] Two sons defining themselves by what they do. What about you? What are you defining yourself by? You profess Christ. You say, I'm a Christian. What are you defining yourself by? Are you defining yourself by what you do or what you haven't done? The good you've done or the bad you've done? Are you defining yourself by what you do? If there's anything you can see in this story, we are not supposed to define ourselves by what we do or what we haven't done for the bad that we've done. Do you have more faith in your sin to disqualify you than God's grace to qualify

you? Do you have more faith when you come in? It's like, oh, I don't have enough faith. Some of us have way too much faith in the wrong thing.

We have way too much faith sometimes in our life for our sin to disqualify us than faith in God's grace to qualify us. And for that, we need to repent with joy, not with your head held down, but it's like, oh God, forgive me for having more faith in my sin to disqualify me than your loving kindness to qualify me. That's what we need to do. Is your security in not doing what other sinners do or in Jesus doing what no one could ever do?

What do you most identify with? Unrighteousness, self-righteousness, or Christ-righteousness?

This is why the phrase boasting in Christ is so important. You're literally identifying primarily in the person and the work of Jesus. I dare not, you know, on Christ the solid rock I stand, like the hymn, right? All other ground is sinking sand. All other grounds of self-righteousness is sinking sand.

My unrighteousness, I dare not trust the sweetest frame, my own self-righteousness, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. I boast in the cross. A Christian boasts in, rejoices in, exalts in. Jesus is my righteousness. It's not what I do. It's not what I've done. It is all what Jesus has done, and his work is finished. It's complete.

This is why Brennan Manning says, define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. All other identity is illusion. God's love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth.

[44:24] Accept that and let it become the most important thing in your life. Run to a celebrating Father. Run to the throne of grace. Let me ask you the question. Maybe before this you'd say emphatic yes, but I'm asking in the context of what we just heard. Do you believe the gospel? Are you believing the good news of the love of the Father shed abroad into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, magnified and put on display in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Do you believe it? Do you believe it? Is it your all? Is it all you're holding on to? Is Jesus? Is Jesus?

What's the sin that you commit that you hate when you commit it? What's the sin that really makes you condemn yourself? What you believe about God in that moment is maybe the most important thing that you believe. When you believe the gospel, it changes everything. It changes everything. You might say this kind of love, you could call him a prodigal God. A God that would, it almost looks like he's wasteful. It almost looks like he's over the top. That God could love sinners and self-righteous people like this younger son and this older son. Some would look at it from the outside and say, what a waste to love those two unworthy people. Yes, you're right. Totally unworthy. Seems very wasteful.

Who would love someone who's so unlovable? Only one. Only one. God in Christ Jesus, the prodigal God. Amen? Amen. Let's stand.