

PM Luke 15

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[0 : 00] in the service from Luke chapter 15. We'll read the first half of the chapter now and then we'll sing again and then we'll read the second half of the chapter. The first half deals with two very familiar parables, the lost sheep and the lost coin, and then the second half of chapter 15 of Luke deals with the parable of the prodigal son, or perhaps more accurately, of the two sons.

So let's read the first half, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him, to hear him, and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

So he told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

[1 : 44] Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Amen.

May God bless this. Let's read the third in this series of parables about lost items. Luke chapter 15 and reading from verse 11.

And he said, there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

[3 : 01] 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 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.

[4 : 07] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. And the father said to his son, 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.

[5 : 42] His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you.

And I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I may 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.

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.

Amen. Amen. Well, I want to draw your attention to this third parable in Luke chapter 15.

[6 : 51] The parable of the prodigal son as its most well known. It is sometimes referred to as the king of parables. Now, all the Lord's parables are beautiful.

But this one is of more beauty than them all. There is a power in it, isn't there? A power to draw out the sympathies of human nature.

Even human nature in its unconverted state will find it difficult not to be moved as this parable is read and the story is unfolded.

How many can read this parable with a heart of stone and feel to be moved by it? I think it strikes a chord and I believe it has been used by the Lord to renew and awaken many a heart.

I believe this parable is designed to do certain things. When we read it, we can feel revived in our hearts a true and real sorrow for sin.

[8 : 00] I think it also is designed to still the fears of a returning repenting sinner.

Will the Father receive me after what I have done? And we read the parable and those fears are calmed and quietened.

I believe it is also designed to confirm the child of God in his devotion to his father. We read the words of the prodigal as he returns to his father, make me like one of your hired servants.

All we want to do on the father's reception of us is to serve him. Not in order to earn his favour but because he has shown such favour and grace towards us.

And I think the whole parable as we read it is designed to stir up grateful praise in the heart of a believer on account of the marvellous, amazing love and grace of God.

[9 : 09] But I think primarily the parable is designed to encourage sinners to return through a compassionate saviour into the arms of a God who loves to forgive.

It illustrates in a most wonderful and graphic and pictorial manner the truth of that glorious statement about God that we looked at this morning from Psalm 130 verse 4.

But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. The parable is often referred to as the parable of the prodigal son as I say.

But it is more accurate to refer to it as the parable of the two sons. I think it is important to note not only the character and behaviour and the need of salvation of the prodigal son but also to carefully take notice of the character, behaviour and need of salvation of the respectable older son as well. because he stands in as much need of being forgiven and reconciled to his father as the younger prodigal son as I hope we shall see in a few moments.

[10 : 33] I think we ought to remember as well the words with which this chapter containing the three parables of Luke 15 began. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying this man receives sinners and eats with them.

In other words it was not only the tax collectors and the sinners who stood in need of the Saviour's mercy and forgiveness but the proud and the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes the so-called teachers of the law they needed Christ's grace and forgiveness too.

And if the prodigal son represents the notorious sinners of Jewish society in those long ago days of the first century A.D. then the older respectable brother represents or stands for the self-righteous respectable sinners of that age and indeed of every age including our own present day.

So I think in the light of that fact I come here to Dumfries Free Church this evening with a message to everyone in this congregation in this church this evening I have something to say to you you are represented in this parable you're portrayed your picture is drawn to one degree or to another by one of the two characters in this parable you're to be seen in either the prodigal son or in the older brother so I want you to think about yourself and to ask yourself questions like these am I guilty of the sins of the prodigal son if that is the case then you stand in need of being forgiven just as he did

and he received forgiveness so then my friend why should you not receive forgiveness for the same sins too one of the great statements

Jesus Christ made in the gospels was this all manner of sins and blasphemy shall be forgiven men what an all encompassing statement that is all manner all types all kinds of sins and blasphemies shall be forgiven men the apostle John said if we confess our sins whatever they might be if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins whatever they might be and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness however there may be others here in this little congregation this evening who are not guilty of any of these gross and outrageous sins of the prodigal son but let me ask you are you guilty of the sins of the older brother if you are then

[14 : 44] I say to you that you stand in as great a need of being forgiven as he did but did you notice in our reading of the parable that it is an open question still to be answered whether the older brother repented and had a change of heart and whether he at some point on that happy evening entered into the father's banqueting hall and joined the celebration that is the great open question and the Lord Jesus has left that question open so that every time this parable is preached and expounded and applied the question is asked again of those who hear it have I repented will I repent will I have a change of mind will I listen to the father's entreaties as he pleads and reasons with me to swallow my pride to receive his love and grace and to enter into the warmth and light and joy of his feast it's of interest to me and I hope it is of interest to you also when turning to

Luke's second volume the Acts of the Apostles we read in chapter 6 verse 7 that the word of God spread in those early days following the day of Pentecost and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly we're told and here's the amazing thing and a large number of the priests became obedient to the faith and a few chapters after chapter 6 and chapter 9 of the Acts of the Apostles we're told the story of the surprising conversion of that Pharisee of the Pharisees Saul of Tarsus there were those clearly in first century Judea and Jerusalem who responded to God's grace and though not notorious flagrant egregious outward sinners were sinners nonetheless and they embraced the grace on offer and were reconciled to God the Father through

Jesus Christ so let's turn our attention to this well known parable of the two sons although there are two sons in the parable there are actually three characters in it for us to think about and to look at more closely there is of course the younger prodigal son there is the respectable older son the prodigal's older brother and then there is the tender hearted and loving father let's spend a few moments thinking about what the Lord in the parable tells us about each and see what we can learn about ourselves and about the God of grace and mercy the younger son he's portrayed for us in verses 11 to 24 of chapter 15 we won't read the verses again they're very familiar I'm sure to you but what a picture this passage is of so many people in the world today it has such a contemporary ring it's hard to believe these words were written some 2000 years ago is not the prodigal's attitude and mindset just like that of so many around us in our own times perhaps he's just like you what does he say to his father what do people say to God today they say something like this

I want your stuff but I don't want you I wish you were dead I want to get away as far from you as I possibly can I'm going to live as I please if I want to squander the good gifts you've given me that's my choice and then if or when things go wrong I'm prepared to do absolutely anything rather than come home to you what is this attitude but what we see in Romans chapter 1 personified it's the mindset of our modern western world in the 21st century as pagan today as it was in first century Roman Empire but it's also utter madness it's utter foolishness for when the day of reckoning comes as it does in this story in this parable the prodigal son is all unprepared to meet the reckoning verse 14 look at what it says after he had spent everything there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need for the first time in his life he began to be in need see him take a real good look at this lad he is destitute he is a total mess his degradation is complete this is what sin does to a human being made in the image of God look at verse 15 so he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to his fields to feed pigs and if that wasn't bad enough for a

Jewish boy from a well to do family then worse was to come he wasn't paid a minimum wage let alone a living wage for verse 16 says he longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating and if things couldn't get any worse there was no charitable food banks to which he could go for emergency rations to tide him over to payday verse 16 goes on to tell us and no one gave him anything and my friends it was in this low state by the grace of God in the words of the ESV he came to his senses but I like the way the authorized version puts it he came to himself he came to

himself you see previously he had been living as if he were beside himself as if he were a madman as if he were an utter fool but now you see by God's grace in God's providence he comes to his senses he comes to himself and see how he begins to reason to think things through to consider things in their true light to reason with himself it's as if his mind has suddenly for the first time in his life kicked into gear and he thinks of his father's house and he thinks of his father's character and goodness he thinks of how kind his father is he thinks of his father's generosity and he says how many of my father's hired men have food to spare and here

[23 : 42] I am starving to death and then you notice in verse 18 he resolves to return he says I will set out and go back to my father and then he decides what he is going to say when he reaches home it's really the only thing that he can say isn't it father I have sinned against heaven and against you and so on but my friend I want you to notice this it's so easy just to pass this by and not take it to heart but I want you to notice this it's so so important he did more than merely resolve to do something he actually went through with it and he did it verse 20 so so he got up and went to his father

I don't know anything about you really but it's quite possible you've sat in church many times and you've heard the word of God being preached by better preachers than I am you've felt the hairs on the back of your neck stand up you've come under a sense of conviction you know and you have felt the power of God's word it's as if God himself is in the pulpit calling you by name to come and receive the salvation on offer in Jesus Christ in the gospel and you've maybe thought you know what I really ought to do that I'll maybe do it tomorrow I'll maybe do it next week when

I come to church better prepared and the moment passes and the resolution stops in the mind as a resolution and fails to develop into an action this boy would have starved to death had he simply resolved and not got up and gone to his father resolutions are no good on their own they have to be accompanied by action out of the depths I cry to you oh lord oh lord hear my cry for mercy everyone who calls upon the name of the lord no matter who they are no matter what they have done everyone who calls upon the name of the lord shall be saved not who resolves to call upon the name of the lord but who calls who cries for mercy have you done that have you got up and gone to your father and at this point in the story our attention switches to the father what do we learn about him well we're told that he saw his son while he was yet a long way off he not only had compassion for him but he was filled with compassion for him and he ran to meet his son he threw his arms around him he kissed him profusely there were no recriminations there was no fault finding there were no blame games neither were there any half measures when it came to the father showing his affection for his returning son this was sincere genuine vigorous action that welled up from a heart that was full of love for his wayward rebellious morally reprehensible sinful boy but there's more the son begins his premeditated confession of sin you know he's been practicing the words since he first thought about them while by the pig sty he's been practicing on them

I'm sure all the way home he knows exactly what he needs to say and how much he needs to say and he begins this premeditated confession of sin but notice how he is interrupted by his father while he's only halfway through what he had planned to say you see such is the father's impatience to show mercy and grace that he breaks into the son's carefully rehearsed confession and he calls for the robe and he calls for the ring and he calls for the sandals to be brought and to be put on his ragged little boy and he calls for the fattened calf to be slaughtered and for the celebrations to begin for this son of was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found and so the rejoicing begins my friends what a beautiful portrayal this is by that exquisite artist the

Lord Jesus Christ of the God of the Bible the Lord Jesus is using this very earthly story to tell us what his father is like and he is the only one who truly knows and he's telling us through the story what business God is in he's in the business of seeking and saving the lost or to put it in the words of scripture for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him Paul says in

[30 : 41] Romans 3 there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement and again he says but God demonstrates his own love towards us in this while we were still sinners like the prodigal Christ his son died for us he says to Timothy here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners or Peter says for Christ died for sins once for all the just for the unjust to bring you to God

the apostle John says how great is the love the father has lavished on us that we that we of all people should be called the children of

God it's by grace that you're saved there's a wonderful gospel hymn based on the opening words of Luke 15 it says sinners Jesus will receive tell this word of grace to all who the heavenly pathway leave all who stumble all who fall this can bring them back again Christ receiveth sinful men Christ receiveth sinful men even me with all my sin opens to me heaven again with him I may enter in death hath no more sting nor pain Christ receiveth sinful men men this accusation that was thrown that was spat at the Lord Jesus Christ by these do-gooders these Pharisees and scribes is one of the greatest glorious descriptions of the work of Christ thank

God he receives sinful men and eats with them that's a wonderful gospel message and then our attention switches to the older son and here we're told about the outwardly respectable model son in verses 25 to 32 of Luke 15 but notice my friends how the father's lavish kindness towards the prodigal son exposes uncovers the wickedness and sin that lay deep down in the heart of this model son he says to his father I've done everything you could want of me and you think really does he not see the irony of these words because right at that very moment he utters them what is this model son doing he is disobeying his father and causing a dreadfully embarrassing scene in front of all his father's invited guests and then he says to his father you've never done anything much for me and yet we are told in verse 12 of the parable of the chapter that the father divided his property between them the younger son asks for what's coming to him to have it now and the father in his grace and forbearance he takes all his property and he divides it between the two of them and this boy being the elder brother the firstborn would have received the lion's share of the inheritance notice too how maliciously he delights to dwell on the past bad behaviour of his younger brother but ignores completely the younger brother's change of heart he thinks the worst of his brother but thinks the best about himself in fact the older brother virtually disowns his younger brother using words in verse 30 which contrasts so sharply you notice from the words his father had used in verse 24 this son of yours he's no brother of mine he's this son of yours

I disown him for what he has done he's your son he's not my brother and yet the father had said in verse 24 this son of mine grace does not disown the son who comes back and repents he's embraced he's given the robe he's given the ring he's given the sandals the celebration feast takes place with the fattened calf slaughtered the friends are invited there is joy in the father's house this son of mine this son of yours what a contrast and this older brother seems to be totally blind to his own sinful and rebellious heart you see his words to his father reveal they're like a window into his heart oh we can't read people's heart yes we can out of the heart the mouth speaks so the mouth is a telltale indicator of what's in the heart and this older brother has no love in his heart for either his father or for his brother and the sight of his father's lavish display of free grace mercy and compassion to his wild living prostitute chasing son makes him only sullen and angry and he's full of bitterness towards his father and he point blank refuses to join the celebrations and enjoy the good things the father has provided this is surely the teaching of

Romans chapter two personified this is what self righteousness looks like and I wonder is this a mirror image of anyone here in this congregation this evening do you look like the older brother is religion for you if truth really be told summed up in these horrible words of the older brother in verse 29 all these years I have been literally literally slaving for you that must have been like a dagger through his father's heart and the father would have every right to ask is that how you really see our relationship is that how you really see me is that how you see

[38 : 06] God and religion to paraphrase the words of the shorter catechism first answer man's chief end is to slave for God and to endure him forever that is the view of the Pharisee and the scribe but it's not the view of the father as taught and illustrated by the Lord Jesus Christ in this king of parables because Jesus mediates and makes known the true personality and character of the father remember the words of John in the opening of his gospel no one has ever seen God but God the one and only who is at the father's side has made him known and my friend look at the God and father of the

Lord Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the actions and words of Jesus Christ and particularly as he is revealed in the teaching of this parable ask yourself again why was this parable told Jesus told it because there were self-righteous critics who judged and condemned him saying this man receives sinners and eats with them and in Jesus teaching in this and in the previous two parables the father is portrayed as one who not only welcomes the returning prodigal but who also actively seeks and

saves that which was lost the shepherd seeking the lost sheep the woman seeking the lost coin and when these lost items are found he rejoices in their recovery and wants to share his joy with those around him verse six then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep and again in verse nine and when she finds it she calls her friends and neighbors together and says rejoice with me I have found my lost coin and listen to the refrain of verse seven and verse ten I tell you in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents I put all this together how on earth can you possibly entertain the idea that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is some kind of great big killjoy whose religion is dull drudgery and ill rewarding slavery that's the mindset of the alienated older brother who represents the Pharisees and the scribes it's not the mindset of Jesus Christ are these the words of a killjoy bring the fattened calf and kill it let's have a feast and celebrate for this son of mine to whom

I ran a great distance to warmly embrace and kiss repeatedly was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found I like the way the King James version also puts it and they began to be merry they began to celebrate says the ESV what did the older brother hear as he came back from the fields that day we're told the music and the dancing in the father's house now these aren't the words of some raging charismatic these are the words of Jesus Christ and he's drawing a picture to convince us of the love grace and mercy of his father and of the joy here's an interesting exercise see this week you've got homework to do it's a great exercise go through

Luke's gospel and then the acts of the apostles and pick out every verse that mentions joy in his gospel and acts and you'll be amazed at how much these two volumes written by Dr.

[43 : 03] Luke contains the theme of joy it's everywhere where God brings his grace he brings joy with it and you see it here in this parable the music and the dancing I don't just have two left feet when it comes to dancing I just hate dancing we've got to go to a wedding reception in a few weeks time I'm drilling it because there's going to be Achille in it it's just not me but here is a picture a picture an earthly story with a heavenly meaning just think of the warmth think of the joy think of the light this is what it means this is what's involved this is part of the experience of the grace and mercy and love of

God and see the father's condescension and kindness to this older son it's amazing really I think it's enough to melt the hardest heart is it not he goes out from the party from the celebrations from the merry making to use the King James language to seek his alienated older son and see how patiently he bears the most stinging attacks on his character and actions from this embittered and estranged boy see how kind he is towards him there are no harsh words there is no punishment made it out there are only more kind and reasonable words that demonstrate the father's love towards him see how he addresses him my son he says my son his kind words are to show the unreasonableness of his son's self righteous and self destructive attitude of heart there is no future my friend there is no joy there is no blessedness outside of the provision to be found in the father's house does the older brother of the prodigal relent does he reflect on his father's approach his entreaties his pleas his love and grace and patience does he humble himself does he say the word that we were teaching to the children to say this morning

I'm sorry please forgive me does he join in the festivities and the celebrations does he see the marvel and the wonder of the father's grace does he bring himself to rejoice in the restoration of the once lost and dead son does he realize that he stands in as much need of his father's forgiveness as his older younger brother that he needs to be restored he needs to be saved and he needs to be forgiven too now as I said before this is something of an open question with the older brother in the parable but the parable after all is just a story an earthly story with a heavenly meaning as we were taught in Sunday school the real story is in the here and now and it has to do with you a voice called you from the word the word of God not the word of man but the word of God and it's the voice of the good shepherd seeking his lost and wandering sheep

Vernon Chaim was a Welsh preacher and pastor and hymn writer died a few years ago but he spoke of this voice so beautifully in a hymn he wrote which echoes some of the themes we've been considering this evening want to leave it with you as we close have you heard the voice of Jesus softly pleading with your heart have you felt his presence glorious as he calls your soul apart with a love so true and loyal love divine that ever flows from a savior righteous royal and a cross that mercy shows have you heard the voice of mercy granting peace and pardon sure have you felt the balm of calvary binding all your wounds secure was there ever such salvation was there ever care

like this see the savior's grief and passion grace and mercy's gentle kiss sign kins have you heard the savior calling all to leave and follow him have you felt his person drawing with compulsion lives to win hearken to his invitation to the music of God's grace.

Let the peace of God's salvation fill your soul and love embrace. It's a wonderful parable.

[49 : 12] It can reduce a heart of stone to tears. But we don't just want an emotional response.

We want a spiritual response. God has put it in his word that you might come unto Jesus weary and burdened that you might find rest for your soul.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we have sown the seed. We've watered the seed.

But only you can make the seed grow. We pray that the Holy Spirit might take the word and that it may take root deep in the hearts of all who have heard it.

And that it might issue in fruit in the shape of repentance from sin and faith and trust and reliance upon Jesus Christ for salvation.

[50 : 41] we thank you for seeking and saving the lost. and we pray that if there be any lost souls here in our service this evening that they would be found and that they would be rejoicing not only in heaven amongst the angels of God but here in the church in Dumfries as well over one sinner who repents.

we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.