

PM Luke 15:11-32 Outrageous Grace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 December 2024

Preacher: Rev David White

[0 : 00] The first couple of verses, verse 1 and 2, and then read verses 11 to 32. So Luke 15, 11 to 32, page 1053.

The first couple of verses set the context for what Jesus has to say afterwards. Verse 1. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, this man receives and eats with them. So he told them this parable.

In fact there are three parables and we're going to pick this up at verse 11. And he said there was a man who had two sons.

And the younger of them said to his father, father give me the share of property that is coming to me. And he divided his property between them.

[1 : 09] 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 in reckless living.

And when he 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. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

[2 : 11] Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he rose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to the father, 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 finger 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 the servant said to him, your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf.

[3 : 22] Because he has received him back safe and sound. But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and then treated 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. 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. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Excuse me a second.

[4 : 40] The title of this evening's message is Outrageous Generosity. Outrageous Generosity.

And this morning in the parable of the prodigal, we focused in on the prodigal son and the father. And this evening our focus is the elder son and the father.

I would like to think about incidents in the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and his ministry where he showed outrageous generosity.

Incidents in which the provision of that which was required far exceeded the need. Perhaps you might think just now of the wedding in Canaan of Galilee and the turning of water into wine.

The very best wine and plenty of it. Or perhaps the feeding of the 4,000, 5,000 with basketfuls left. [5 : 52] 12 basketfuls left over from such a small beginning. These are examples, I believe, of the grace of God.

Examples of God's unmerited favor. For ourselves, grace is not just a sentiment. It only becomes a reality in the way we behave towards God and towards others.

As Christians, we're called not only to worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but we're to become more like Jesus. A process called sanctification.

This becoming more like Jesus should manifest itself in the way we live our lives and in the way we interact with those around us, whether they're fellow believers or just the folks we meet on a day-to-day basis who perhaps have no faith or perhaps have a different faith.

In Romans 8, 29, we read, For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn amongst many brothers.

[7 : 09] So we're called to emulate Jesus. Now there are limitations in relation to how much like Jesus we can be. Jesus is the God-man, both divine and human.

We, for example, I, for example, could not die for the sins of another as Jesus did. But we can offer ourselves sacrificially in the service of others.

Jesus is the perfect expression of humanity as God intended us to be. In other words, Jesus models for us what a true human being should be like.

We read in the beginning of Hebrews, Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he opposes the universe by the word of his power.

Jesus is the manifestation of God in human flesh as we celebrate at Christmas the coming into the world of Emmanuel. We are simply human, not human and divine as Jesus was.

[8 : 25] But once we have God living in us by his Spirit, we are enabled to exhibit the Spirit's fruit, which are Christ-like characteristics that we read about in Galatians 5, verse 22.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Paul writes against such things as these, there is no law. Our focus as believers can be entirely towards worshipping Jesus, which is right and proper but we can miss the need to model ourselves on him, manifesting, that is, making real his teaching, his lifestyle, and his character.

The Gospel and outrageous generosity are very closely related. God's gracious generosity is best revealed in the incarnation of his Son. How wonderful it is that the God of Heaven should choose to come to this sin-cursed earth to seek and save sinners like ourselves.

Today we're most especially focusing on the parable of the prodigal son, which could be entitled the parable of the outrageous generosity of a graceful father.

[9 : 58] This morning we considered how the younger son, the prodigal in this parable, chose to be hedonistically lost.

He chose a lifestyle that was reckless and he very quickly spent all that he took from his father's inheritance. He chose to take the share of his father's estate and to go his own way.

The parable teaches that the father had two sons and he loved both of them equally. He went out of his way for both sons and was generous to both sons.

The embrace of the younger son on his return did not mean the rejection of the older son. Far from it. Jesus' love of sinners does not negate his love for those who through faith seek to live righteously.

The older brother in this parable is not so much offended by the younger brother's return because in Judaism as well as in Christianity there's a clear provision for the restoration of repentant, penitent sinners.

[11 : 15] The issue for the older brother was the extravagance of the provision made for the younger brother. Banqueting, music, dancing.

These are the things that I believe really stuck in the older brother's claw. His sentiment I believe was yes, let this prodigal return but to bread and water not a fatter calf.

In sackcloth not in a new robe. Wearing ashes not a new ring. In tears not in merriment. Kneeling not dancing.

So this parable compares the response of the older son to those of the Pharisees and Sadducees which is why I read those two verses at the beginning. The teachers of the law they grumbled against Jesus because Jesus spent his time with tax collectors and sinners.

Hallelujah. Thank God Jesus spent his time with tax collectors and sinners. Or where would we be? These people, these Jewish leaders were steeped in Jewish doctrine.

[12:29] Desperately seeking to live a perfect life but totally lacking grace and compassion for others. grace. So that leads us to ask the question well what about ourselves those redeemed by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ?

How graceful and inclusive are we? Theological correctness and doctrine can take precedence over showing grace.

is our theology based on our ecclesiology or is it based on our Christology? That was a question that I was asked whilst at college.

Let me unpack what I mean by that. I was brought up in the Anglican church and so my understanding of God was influenced by the way that we did church the ecclesiology of the Anglican tradition.

And if we stop and think about it the same is true for every person sitting here this evening. The positions we hold doctrinally have been influenced by the interpretation of scripture we've come to hold dear.

[13:42] It won't be any surprise to any of us to know that different denominations interpret the scripture in different ways. In fact we all also interpret the scriptures for ourselves.

When I joined Dumfries Baptist Church in 1987 I discovered a different way of being church a different emphasis on the scriptures.

My childhood understandings were challenged and I came to a much more Christ-centered doctrinal understanding. I still hold on now when I go back to the Anglican church on occasion and we go through the liturgy when I was a child that was something I just parroted because I knew it word for word.

I didn't really think about the words that I was saying but when I go back now I believe as a born again believer then these words really mean something.

But my childhood impression of God was of a judge pointing the finger and I totally seemed to miss the reality of the fact that yes God is righteous and yes God is just but God is also loving and gracious so much so that he sent his son to save a sinner like myself.

[15:07] I didn't really grasp that until I was 34 years old at a meeting in Moffat when God touched my heart and helped me to see that he loved me as an individual.

It was no longer religion it was relationship. So if Jesus is at the centre of all that we believe then our theology should reflect this.

If Jesus is at the centre of who we are as church then our ecclesiology should reflect this. The way we do missions should also manifest as a Christological centre rather than being a reflection of our traditions.

These are lots of ologies which I had to smile to myself when I was writing this down. I don't know if any of you you've probably all heard of Maureen Lippman. Has everybody heard of Maureen Lippman?

She's a Jewish actress and a very funny lady and she played in a sitcom on the television in 1987 she played an overprotective Jewish grandmother and the scene is having just been told by her grandson Anthony that he's failed his exams passing only pottery and sociology Beattie says to him he gets an ology and he says he's failed you get an ology you're a scientist which is a totally different way to think about the whole thing and that's what touched my heart that night in Moffat this man spoke about the way Jewish parents always seek to encourage their children whereas my father continually put me down in fact I only think of twice in my whole life where he said something positive to me and I remember those two occasions because they were special you get an ology you're a scientist question is though do we really put

[17:14] Jesus first is Jesus really at the centre of all that we do and all that we are have we lost sight of God's generosity do we fail to reflect God's outrageous generosity manifest in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is God's generosity and grace evidence in our relationships is it evident in our desire to be reconciled to others those who may have hurt us or offended us do we see the original

goodness of God as well as the original sin in those we encounter are we conscious of the fact that every human being is created in the image of God are we known for standing up for what is good and right or are we known as those who stand against every issue do we portray a negative outlook or do we seek to offer a positive alternative

I think these are important questions how does the world perceive us isn't it better to be offering a positive alternative rather than offering a negative outlook we pray your kingdom come but what does that look like if it's not a kingdom of grace there's lots of questions and I just find these questions challenging how do we show grace whilst taking a stand about for example a sister dying or same sex marriage Jesus loved the sinner he spent time with tax collectors and sinners but he never condoned the sin grace is required in order to be able to do that to love the sinner but not to condone the sin and not to get drawn back in to sin as well there are lovely couple in Fort William Baptist Church both of whom had a history of drug abuse and we're not talking about smoking the odd joint they were into heroin and cocaine and by the grace of God they came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and they were on fire for the Lord and they wanted all their friends all their drug taking friends to come to a knowledge of Jesus as well and so without the support of the church they began to witness to everybody that they knew but gradually and slowly because they didn't have the support of the church they drifted back in to their life of drug taking and when we arrived I remember one Sunday evening these two people all dressed in black wearing hoods came in and sat at the back of the church with their hoods pulled over their faces and it was someone else in the church who told me who they were and I thank God that through the grace of God and through the preaching of the word those two individuals realized there was a way back to

God for them that God really and truly did love them and they repented of their sin and they gave their hearts once again to the Lord Jesus Christ one of them became an elder in the church and together at their initiative they started a meeting on a Friday night that was dedicated to people with drug drink and mental health issues and that meeting is still going on today the impact on so many other souls because they knew that God loved them the truth is that like the father in Jesus' parable God's love and grace always flows outwards this love and grace should flow through us both individually and corporately as a body of Christ if we're self-centered and self-seeking then our energies are always focused inward and we become mean-spirited and insular and fearful corporately focusing inward on our particular church or denomination results in my experience in squabbles cliques and trouble in the ministries that we established in Fort

William and the ministers that I'm still involved in in the Baptist church at the moment there's always an outward focus to every ministry every ministry and every small group should have an outward looking focus you know some are supporting children in Africa the group that meet the elder seniors group support a family in Nepal and particularly two boys of this family adopted so that these boys get an education one of them didn't go to school until he was 12 and now aged 18 he's just qualified as a male nurse and has gone to Kathmandu to get his license to practice so it can make such a difference I pray that energized by the spirit of God we seek to express the outrageous generosity of God's grace in real and tangible acts of kindness and compassion I pray that we would have a generous lifestyle by that

[23 : 15] I mean make our self-seeking the measure of our self-giving see the elder brother in today's passage was totally self-centered and graceless crying out for justice rather than celebrating the outrageous generosity of his father and the restoration of his lost brother I was asked the following question some time ago if your church closed down tomorrow what would people in the wider community miss if anything I know for sure that I need more of God in me that we need more of ourselves committed to God it's poignant to reflect that it was the same kind of jealousy and envy that brought the other son into Dave's Bible passage to the cross by this I mean the son who's telling the story

Jesus the only begotten son of God those who thought of themselves as religious and righteous just could not stomach the outrageous grace and compassion that the son of God showed to others Jesus challenged their perceived self-imposed boundaries of grace he was accused by them of being a friend of sinners who ate with outcasts who brought healing to the sick and reconciliation to the lost so let's consider him in all that we are and all that we do and by God's outrageous grace may we become more like Jesus the older son had been obedient while his younger brother had devoured his father's property in fact his father's very life you can sense the anger of the older

brother as you read this passage from his perspective all the younger son has to do is come home and his father kills the fatted calf verse 29 the father has never even given him as much as a goat to share with his friends so it's very much a woe is me attitude this reminds me of a parable Jesus told of labourers in the vineyard who complained to the owner of the vineyard in Matthew 20 verse 12 those you employed last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the scorching heat says one other people that were employed early in the day but he the owner of the vineyard replied to one of them friend I'm doing you no wrong did you not agree to work for a denari take what belongs to you and go if I choose to give to the last worker as I give to you am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me or do you begrudge me by generosity the father in the parable responds graciously to the anger and accusation from the older son he simply says to this older son and it's a wonderful verse son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours but it was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this brother of yours was dead and is alive he was lost and is found these words echo verses 7 and 10 in the previous parables the picture here is one of sheer grace when this elder son learns what has happened he refuses to even enter the house so the father goes out to plead with him but before the father can speak the elder son vents his anger he pleads his own merit set against his brother's treachery as justification for his anger and the grounds for his perceived injustice he doesn't even address his father respectfully he simply enters into this tirade of fury he's worked long and hard we see that the attitude of the elder brother is similar to the murmurings of the

Pharisees who grumbled about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners they are unmasked by Jesus words for their self-serving indignation at the love and grace exhibited by the Lord Jesus Christ the last time I shared with you we looked at the parable of the good Samaritan which is another example of the difference between those who live by justice and merit and those who must ask for grace and mercy the parable shows that those who live by merit can never know the joy of grace we can never share in the father's grace if we demand that he deal with us according to what we deserve we sang earlier in the psalm and if God did deal with us according to what we deserve we would all be lost eternally lost Zephaniah 3:17 says the Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will save he will rejoice over you with gladness he will quiet you by his love he will exalt over you with loud singing this is the God we worship you can never be more loved by God than you already are tonight if necessary come to your senses like the prodigal son allow God to lift you out of the slime and mire and set your feet on the rock the solid rock that is Christ

Jesus the question we're left with in relation to the older brother are two questions because we're not told did the older brother join the celebration did he go in and welcome his brother home or did he stay outside feeling wronged the decisions we make in relation to these questions asked here I believe are crucial if we go in we accept grace as being the father's rule for life in the family of God if we stay outside we continue to measure people by our standards of merit and justice rather than God's mercy I'd like to finish our time together this evening by a story it's a Jewish story that tells of the good fortune of a hard working farmer the Lord appeared to this farmer and granted him three wishes but with a condition that whatever the

[30 : 40] Lord did for the farmer double would be given to his neighbour so this farmer scarcely believed in his good fortune wished for a hundred cattle immediately he received a hundred cattle and he was overjoyed until he saw that his neighbour had two hundred cattle so he wished for a hundred acres of land and again he was filled with joy until he saw that his neighbour had two hundred acres of land rather than celebrating God's goodness and grace the farmer could not escape feeling jealous and slighted because his neighbour had received more than he had finally he stated his third wish that God would strike him blind in one eye and God wept these parables expose the grudging spirit that can prevent us from receiving God's mercy and grace grace only those who can celebrate

God's grace to others can experience the mercy and grace of God for themselves let's pray heavenly father we thank you for these three stories that Jesus told thank you thank you that Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost it was God's heart to send his sinless son to seek and save people like ourselves from a lost eternity Lord we thank you for the love and grace and mercy that we received none of which we deserved help us once again to recognize the extent and cost of your love exemplified in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary help us Lord to live lives of love and grace help us not to measure ourselves against others but Lord to exemplify something of the Lord

Jesus Christ in the way we live and the way we act and thank you Lord that one day we'll be home in eternity with you because the Lord Jesus is risen and we too will one day rise to be where we sang we would like to be in his courts gazing on his beauty we bless you Lord for your love in Jesus name Amen our closing item of song worship this evening is r us on JAMA and the bottom is open