

Scandalous Grace

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[0:00] Well, hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. If for any reason you'd like to learn more about us, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, our heart is this simple. We just want to get into the Word of God and we want that Word to get into these hearts and truly transform us from the inside out.

And today we're in week number seven of our series called Good News. We're in Luke chapter 15, if you want to turn there. And the message is called Scandalous Grace.

So I heard a theological phrase for the first time 11 days ago that honestly just rocked my world. I couldn't stop thinking about this. Scandalous grace.

And if you've received this, you get it. But if you haven't, I hope you'll keep listening. See, one of the greatest theological minds in history, A.W. Tozer, he put it like this, Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving.

[1:13] Its use to sinful people is to save us and make us sit together in heavenly places to demonstrate to the ages the exceeding riches of God's kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Now, let me give a powerful example of this that brought tears to my eyes. A pastor friend of mine had to deal with a pretty unique situation in his church.

A man had started to fade away from kind of church activities, kind of alienating himself, and was just really struggling spiritually. So the pastor had been reaching out to try to help him find his way back.

And one day, he came in, and he admitted that he'd been having an affair. Well, expecting all kinds of shame from this pastor, he even thought maybe he'd ask him to leave the church for good.

And although this pastor didn't make light of his sin and the damage that it could cause, he explained that God's grace was greater than any sin, that Jesus' love had been chasing after this man and that the power of God can wash clean anyone who confesses and repents turning back to Christ.

[2:24] Well, he was so overwhelmed by this grace that he rededicated his life right there. And in tears, in the midst of this conversation, he said that he wanted to share God's love, get this, with the husband of the woman that he had been having an affair with.

Say what? So he went that very day, found that man, and begged him for forgiveness. He shared his own experience of how he had received God's amazing grace, and he told the man all about Jesus and what he could do in his life as well.

And then, two days later, that man shows up in the same pastor's office wanting to talk about Jesus. And listen, it wasn't much longer that they baptized this guy into Christ, and now both of these men are walking faithfully with Jesus.

That is scandalous grace. So, welcome back to week number seven of euangelion. That's the Greek word that means good news.

We've seen that Jesus changes everything as we've been marching our way towards Resurrection Sunday, letting his words hopefully transform us from the inside out.

[3:42] And today, we're going to talk about scandalous grace as we look at what I think should be called the parable of the prodigal sons, plural. So, grab your Bibles, or even the Holy Glow of your Bible app, and let's head towards the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15.

Luke chapter 15. And listen, it is okay if you're new to this Bible kind of journey, this faith journey, and you need to use the table of contents in the front of your Bible, that's okay. Listen, you're growing, you're learning one day at a time, and we're all in different places on that journey. So, keep pursuing Jesus, and it will get easier. But let's paint the picture of where we are in Jesus' earthly ministry.

As we come to Luke chapter 15, this is what most scholars think was the last few months of Jesus' earthly ministry before he went to the cross to give his sinless life for you and me.

He's already been ministering for three-ish years at this point. He's in the later stages of his time in Galilee. He's making his way to Jerusalem.

[4:53] And the grumbling about Jesus from the religious leaders is intensifying. They are playing dirty behind the scenes, plotting against him. And as Luke 15 opens, we see a distinct difference between our Savior and the teachers of the law, the Pharisees.

See, Jesus makes his purpose clear in Luke 19.10 after scandalous grace came to the house of a tax collector named Zacchaeus. Jesus says, for the Son of Man came, so this is his purpose, to seek and save the lost.

Period. And yet, the Pharisees viewed these outcasts of society as somehow inferior, not worthy to be in their presence, or even in the Heavenly Father's, because they based everything off of good works, outward appearance, following a set of rules that were largely man-made.

And listen, we still have quote-unquote religious people in churches today who do this same thing. They justify it. Well, they did this in their past, but me, I've stayed holy.

I didn't drink, smoke, chew, or go with any women who do. And that self-righteous posture, I'm telling you, it's a dangerous poison to drink, because if every heart motive, if every thought, every ugly action were laid bare before the spotlight of God's holiness, His holy word as well, we're just as much a wretch as anyone else, and we're all in desperate need of grace.

[6:29] See, as we come to Luke chapter 15, let me show you the religious leaders' words that prompt Jesus to tell three parables or three stories in this chapter.

Here's what it says in Luke 15, 1 and 2. Now, the tax collectors and the sinners were gathering around to hear Jesus, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

How dare he, right? As they completely missed the point of the good news in even their own lost state. And Jesus goes on to tell three fictional stories with powerful spiritual lessons.

The lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, that all end in celebration of God's, what appears to be, scandalous grace. And yet, these religious leaders are honestly thrown a hissy fit over lost people crowding around Jesus.

They're not celebrating like they should be. And these first two parables are quick. The lost sheep shows the father's love where he momentarily steps away from the 99 to chase after the one rejoicing over a sinner's change of heart.

[7:44] The lost coin proves the same point, that heaven bursts forward in jubilation over the lost discovering grace. And then this last one is a little bit stronger in explanation of the father's heart for the lost and even those who don't think they're lost.

So, let's break this up into two scenes. You could even say two different audiences that Jesus was speaking to here. So, if you want to go to the YouVersion, Y-O-U version Bible app, you can go to that.

It's a free download. It's an awesome resource. Go to that. Go to the menu. Go to events. Go to First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. And then you can see our outline that way.

Take notes off to the side. But let's break it up this way. Let's look at scene one. We're going to call this the lost. You're not too far gone.

Now, we say this all the time here because it's biblical and we believe it. It doesn't matter whether where you've been. It doesn't matter what you've smoked, snorted, drank, or injected.

[8:54] We don't care how many times you've made the same bad relationship decision. You've ignored the Lord or even spoke against Him. It doesn't matter what family you come from. Or if you've burnt every bridge and don't really have much family left.

I don't care if you've lived in a mansion or you've spent time in prison. If you resemble the woman at the well or even the leper that's been kept at a distance, it doesn't matter.

If you think you're too far gone for God to forgive you, then listen, I got good news. You're absolutely wrong according to the truth. So, let's start here in Luke chapter 15, verse 11.

Jesus continued, there was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, give me my share of the estate. So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in the whole country, and he began to be in need.

[9:59] So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of the country who sent him to the fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

Okay, so this story honestly would have been a shocker to anybody listening, and all I can think of is this son's ridiculous request, and that it was motivated by one thing that honestly sounds like an old commercial that you might remember.

It's my money, and I want it now. Do you remember that? That's called selfishness. This isn't how inheritances worked then or now, because in the first century Jewish culture, it was all about respect and honor, and it would have been beyond offensive to ask for your inheritance before your dad died.

In fact, he was essentially saying to his father, I want you dead because I care more about what I get than your life. This was arrogant. It could have cost the son his future inheritance altogether. He could have been disowned. He could have been beaten for this, even killed according to Jewish law for this kind of disrespect. And in this culture with two sons, the oldest would have gotten two-thirds of their father's estate.

[11:18] The oldest always got the most, and the youngest would have got one-third. only after their father had passed away. And probably the most shocking part would have been the father allowing all of this to happen, doing what his son asked of him.

This would have made both the sinners and the Pharisees' jaws just drop and protest. This father would have lost all respect in the community. He would have been shamed, humiliated for allowing his son to act this way and get away with it.

And then we find out that the son got his inheritance from the father, just like he asked, in some kind of money, some kind of currency, as he sets off for a distant land away from any accountability.

Wild living, or as the older brother says in verse 30, with prostitutes. And isn't it amazing how when we live it up or we quote-unquote sow our wild oats, have you ever noticed it doesn't satisfy?

Because when the party is over, when the high comes down, when the liquid courage fades, when we find that success we thought we were longing for, we find ourselves empty, longing for more.

[12:31] And listen, this son would have been the man, would have been the man while he was passing out Benjamins to everyone, but when the money was gone, his friends disappeared because they weren't friends.

He squandered his fortune and had nothing, absolutely nothing to show for it. And on top of what he could control came some things he could not.

A severe famine had hit the land. And for the first time in his life, he was living in poverty in absolute desperation, starving, alone. And when verse 15 says he hired himself out to a citizen to feed pigs, first, that word translated hired is probably a bit too strong.

It literally means he glued himself to this man. So it almost appears that he's just desperate, not necessarily hired, but clinging to a man who has means, but getting nothing back in return other than, fine, go feed my pigs and you can fight with them over their nasty food.

And here's something to think about. To be a Jewish man with Jewish customs, taking care of pigs, that would have been considered one of the most degrading occupations imaginable.

[13:46] And yet, that's what sin does. The well-known Baptist preacher, Adrian Rogers, captured the spiritual reality of this story well. He said, sin will take you farther than you want to go, it'll keep you longer than you want to stay, and it will cost you more than you want to pay.

And just like this younger son who found himself hitting rock bottom, trying to fight pigs for slop, maybe we've been there too. Chasing after a life that promised so much only to find ourselves flat on our faces, broken in every way.

So good news. That's exactly where Jesus wants and even needs to meet us. Watch how this story unfolds here in Luke 15.

Let's pick up where we left off in verse 17. Talking about the younger son, it says, when he came to his senses, such a powerful phrase, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have food to spare and here I am starving to death.

I'll set out and go back to my father and say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

[14:59] Make me one of your hired servants. Do you see the complete heart change that's happened here? Now look at verse 20. So he got up and went to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

But the father said to his servants, quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and let's celebrate.

For this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And so they began to celebrate. The key phrase is that the younger son came to his senses.

Here's what that means. He had a sudden, sobering realization of his own foolishness, misery, sin, and need for change.

[16:04] I'm guessing it looked like probably a complete meltdown with tears flowing and really a much needed heart transformation as he was surrounded by swine, smothered by swine.

And as he's thinking, you know, this isn't the life my father had planned for me. I was created for so much more and yet my own sin and rebelliousness has led me here.

This is what the New Testament calls repentance. That realization that my sin has separated me from a perfect and loving Heavenly Father. And that commitment to surrender all of me to all of him according to all of his word for the rest of my days.

And then I follow him into those baptism waters and I come out as a brand new creation in Christ ready to live for Jesus the rest of my days. And we see evidence of heart change in the line that he's rehearsing.

In his mind he's got what he's going to say to his father thought through. Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.

[17:16] You know, scripture is clear. There's no salvation in Jesus without true heart repentance. In fact, in the book of Acts chapter 2 we read about a story that we call Pentecost where the Holy Spirit came upon the believers for the first time as the church was birthed into this world and they preached in languages that they had never known by the Holy Spirit's power.

As they shared the good news of Jesus it says thousands were cut to the heart by this message of grace. So repentance in their hearts that's what's happening here.

And they asked the apostles what must we do to be saved? In Acts 2:38 Peter replied to them repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That's God living inside of you. Now, going back to the prodigal son we see this arrogant brass entitled young man now approaching his father in complete humility.

I know the depth of my sin against you father. Just let me be one of your lowest servants. And that's the same heart that we've got to have too. See, like we've said many times here at FCC just coming forward on a Sunday to give your confession of faith and being dunked in the water that's not enough.

[18:45] All of that has to be preceded and only God knows what's really going on in the heart but it's got to be preceded by a heart of

repentance before the Lord. It's not some mechanical step one, step two, step three, whoo, I got my get out of hell free card, okay?

Uh-uh, that's not how this works. It takes a true repentance, that commitment to surrender my sin and all of me for the rest of my days to the only one who created me for a purpose.

But you know what? As much as we want to make the younger son the primary character in this story, I'd give that role to the father and his incredible mercy on sinners.

He's the star of this show and look at how this goes down. While the son was on his journey back home rehearsing his line, the father sees him at a distance and he comes running to meet him.

He hugs and kisses him. The son has to be in shock over this and did you know in their culture an older man like this would never run because it was considered undignified?

[19:55] He'd have to hike up his robe, show way too much skin, right? And yet the father doesn't care about any of that. He simply cares about his lost child coming home.

Guys, that's what's been called scandalous grace that honestly doesn't make any earthly sense to us. I can't for the life of me understand why the Lord would show you and me this kind of grace but like the son, okay, I'll take it.

I'm coming home. I'm receiving his compassion. I'm letting him put a ring on my finger, sandals on my feet, a robe around me, basically declaring me as his child as we celebrate another name written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And I love how a popular women's speaker, Patsy Claremont, just a fantastic speaker. She said this in her book. She said, grace finds us in our poverty and presents us with a gift of an inheritance that we didn't deserve.

And I hope for anyone who doesn't know Jesus as Lord and Savior who's listening to me right now, I hope today is the day you will realize God's arms are open wide and it's time for you to come home.

[21:11] And this is the point in the message where I realized I could have made this into two Sundays worth of preaching. So forgive me that I'm going to pass over a few details. I hope you'll go a little deeper on your own in this.

But let's jump into scene two. We're going to call this the misguided. You need grace too. While I love the story of the younger son that just points to an awesome God of compassion, I think we can overlook the other prodigal, the other lost son.

And it's clear that Jesus is preaching to two different crowds here. To the notorious sinners gathered around him, the tax collectors, the lowest of society, as he wanted them to know regardless of what they had been told, that there's a heavenly father who's not given up on them. But to the crowd of self-righteous religious leaders snarling their noses at the less thans, he had a character that represented them as well. That was the older brother.

So let's look at the end of our story here. We'll pick up in verse 25. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.

[22:25] So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. Your brother has come home, he replied, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him safe and sound. The older brother became angry, refused to go in.

Now watch this heart. So his father went out and pleaded with him. I mean, what a compassionate father this was. But he answered his father, look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

I think he's lying by the way, but he's exaggerating here, okay? Yet you never gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But look at verse 30. But when the son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.

So he's having an absolute pity party. But look at what the father says, my son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and he's alive again.

He was lost and is now found. Followers of Jesus, hear me. One of the greatest dangers in our faith is when we stop growing. When we replace our personal walk with Jesus with religious activity.

[23:36] That's what these Pharisees were doing. But it's our daily relationship with Christ through the word and through prayer that produces godly fruit. It's the Holy Spirit moving in me as I pursue the heart of God.

That's what makes me want to live a life of purity. It's his daily and perfect provision that makes me strive to serve with my gifts, to be a faithful steward of his resources, to pour into others, to share good news with those who don't know Jesus, and even to love others when it's not easy. See, this older brother had already hit the jackpot. His birth order gave him two thirds of the estate, and because the younger son got his, he technically oversaw the rest already. All this massive estate was his now, and trust me, despite his exaggerated words, he was living just fine. He had plenty to look forward to someday when his father would pass away. And if you look at the younger brother's earlier behavior, it's not that different than the older brother's tirade here at the end. The younger brother was just much more public about his greed and selfishness, whereas the older brother kept his wicked, selfish thoughts to himself, and now when something big went down, it finally came exploding out.

[24:59] See, here's the thing, anytime we stop celebrating the lost being found, placing our own stipulations on God's grace, we're in absolute danger of being a modern day Pharisee.

Anytime we start thinking our good works have earned our eternal inheritance, we're sadly mistaken biblically and have lost sight of our own great debt of sin that Jesus paid on our behalf. Anytime our quote-unquote faith makes us mistreat another made in the image of God, creating an elite class of saints, it looks too much like these Pharisees. Anytime the rules apply to everyone else and not to me, that heart has gone down to dangerous, dangerous path. And when we can't celebrate the Lord working in powerful ways and just keep coming back to what I want, listen, that's not good. This is what we call self-righteous, legalistic, religious behavior. And listen, Jesus stood up the strongest against this group, this way of thinking. See, in our culture, in Bible-believing churches, we take this strong stand against what's called theological liberalism, where so many are watering down truth, they are making weak justifications for ungodly behaviors because they want to do whatever their flesh wants to do and they want to support others who want to do whatever their flesh wants to do.

[26:28] That's why some churches accept behaviors that go against the heart of God through His word and I don't want to be in that place. And we're really good as Bible-believing churches at standing against this as we should be, as we should also do it in love, because the truth will set you free.

But sometimes we ignore the other extreme that I call radical legalism that looks a lot like these religious leaders who were scowling Jesus' way.

We take this amazing grace that we don't deserve, we nix the intimate relationship part which it's all about, and we turn this faith into something it was never meant to be, into a set of rules that I've added my own stuff into, just in case God doesn't know what He's doing, and then we use it as a weapon to show our superiority and others' inferiority.

And I'm not sure if you've noticed, but these are some of the meanest people on the face of the earth who claim to follow Jesus, and they run so many people off, and it's heartbreaking, and you know what?

You and I can go right into that same trap if we're not careful. We have to be careful that we stay so connected to the vine, to Jesus, that we don't travel that road, and that we always keep the main thing, the main thing.

[27:58] Because here's the Lord's heart in 1 Timothy 2. He says, this is good and pleases God our Savior. See, here's God's heart, who wants all people, all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Even the older son who's easy to hate on in this story. So, let me leave you with this. Good news. Euangelion, good news.

If you can identify with either the older or the younger son here, know that God's grace wants to meet you today and bring hope. You're not too far gone.

It takes a repentant heart before the Lord. So, come home. Child, come home to scandalous grace that will set you free.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for this scandalous grace as we've called it today that saves us, that changes us, that forgives us, that sets us free, that gives us a purpose.

[29:04] May we walk in your grace and may we never become these legalistic pharisaical types. May we truly rejoice in the things that you rejoice about.

And we pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen and amen. Hey, real quick, I want to give you this invitation. If you are listening to this and you have questions about faith, you want to talk about giving your life to Jesus, you want to know more about First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, my name is Ray Sweet.

I would love to help you with this. So you can reach out to us in a couple ways, 812-663-8488 or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

Hey, God bless you. Hope you have a fantastic week.