

The Parable of the Lost Son

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[0:00] Amen. This wonderful parable of the prodigal son is well known to many, if not all of us.

We are familiar with the story. In fact, I bet many of you can retell it. The word prodigal son is part of our lexicon in a defining way due to this very parable.

But I wonder if we might look at this story afresh this morning. Not so much to give it a new meaning, but to be reminded of its truth.

This is the most famous of Jesus' parables. And it is like a mirror by which we can see ourselves.

So I invite you to look in the mirror this morning.

We can see the condition of our heart in this story that Jesus told. And if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, we'll see the deep spiritual truth of God's kingdom that our Lord has asked for us within it.

[1:14] But we must first see the story within the context in which it was told. So I think the passage for that book, I invite you to turn your Bible, actually to open it up as we go along.

It's on page 1039 of your pew Bible. If you will grab the pew Bible if you don't have a personal copy of yours. And I want to refer you to chapter 15, verse 1 and 2, first and foremost.

This first two verses gives us the context for the whole chapter. Luke tells us that now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him, that is Jesus.

The tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

That's the context for the successive parables that Jesus then begins to tell in chapter 15. Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one that was lost.

[2:34] And the parable of the lost coin, the woman who left the nine coins to seek the one that was lost. And both of those parables were buttressed with the fact that there is great rejoicing at the finding of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

And then the last parable is this parable that we are looking at this morning, the parable of the lost son. In fact, I think it's the parable of the lost sons.

We'll see that as we get to the end of this parable. As a response, and it's a particular pointed response. God, Jesus, in his great wisdom, his marvelous teacher, and he reveals the rod of our hearts.

And he's doing that to the Pharisees and the scribble grumbling at Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors. And he told them these very first two parables. And then the last parable, he tells them the parable of the lost son, the father and his two sons.

We are told in verse 12 of chapter 15 that the younger of the sons said to his father, Father, father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

[3:46] And the father divided his property between them. Now, the laws of inheritance in Israel in those days is quite similar to ours.

Children don't often inherit until the parents are dead. But in some cases, in rare cases, just like today too, the father may apportion the inheritance to his sons before his death.

To his children before his death. But he would still be held in trust, typically. Even as he apportioned the property and its inheritance to his children, he would be held in trust so that the father still, while he's alive, governs and benefits from the profits.

Even though it is being apportioned and given out to the children. And normally this happens, if it does happen, it happens at the initiation of the father.

But here, the son is the one initiating it. The son comes and makes this request of his father. I hope you see, this is an act of betrayal on the part of this younger son.

[5:04] The younger son, as much as told his father, Dad, I wish you were dead. And I would rather not wait until that happens. So just give me what is mine now, and I'll be on my way.

It'll be as you were already dead. That's what's going on here in this request. In effect, the son disowned his own father and his family and his heritage.

And soon after, the father does divide the inheritance. He sold it off. And he takes the prophet from it. And he heads off.

Sold it off to the prophets and went off into the far country, Jesus says. He goes away from the father's presence. From the father's loving supervision.

And while in the far country, we're told, He squandered, He wasted his inheritance. In reckless living.

[6:09] That's all Jesus says. But we can imagine the reckless living. A life of dissipation. A life of enjoying the pleasures of the world.

Living the good life, as people in the world will say it today. But it's not a good life at all, is it? We see it. Look further in the story. This is, by the way, he lives this life of profligacy.

This is why he's called the prodigal son. The word itself, prodigal, describes a life of reckless wastefulness. That's the kind of life he lived.

And before long, he soon ran out of money. And unfortunately for him, he ran out of money in the middle of a severe famine. The worst time to run out of money.

If there's ever a good time. And in his desperation, he's out of money. He's away in the far country. In his desperation, he got a job feeding pigs.

[7:21] A Jewish man, reduced to feeding unclean animals. And eventually, eventually, it goes even worse than that.

He even longed, the language that he longed to eat the food of these unclean animals. That is the abject place he has found himself.

One might ask at this point of the story, where were his friends? The ones he partied with and wasted his money on. They were nowhere to be found.

That's the reality, isn't it? The offerings of Satan, the offerings of the world, are empty at the end of the day. Satan comes with lies and says, God, your Father, your Creator, can't be trusted, he tells us.

He twists God's Word, as he did in the garden. How evil of God to say you cannot eat the fruits of this beautiful garden, when in fact, God never said you can eat the fruit of the...

[8:36] God said the opposite. You can eat, all of it is yours. Eat, and be glad. Just don't eat this one fruit of this one tree.

But look at Satan. He twists God's Word, and then he says, he tells lies about God to us. As his children, he says, what a killjoy your father is.

He offers pleasures beyond your wildest dreams. But when the smoke screen fades, it reveals chains of bondage, as it does for this younger son.

The ruinous consequences of a life separated from God. And soon you discover that the dreams that were offered by Satan is actually a nightmare.

All alone. And that's where this younger son has found himself. Undoubtedly, this younger son had determined there was more joy.

[9:43] There was more fame. More to be offered. More on offer in the far country than in the Father's house. That's why he decided what he decided.

That's why he rebelled and betrayed his father and his family. The son's love for this present world was more than the love he owed to his father.

And now he's reaping the penalty of his rebellion and his betrayal. He had fallen so far, so far, that he was longing.

He was longing to eat pig food. I don't think you ever want to eat pig food at any time. Even when there is plenty.

But I think, especially when there's famine, I don't know if there's any sort of correlation of when pig foods are better in the time. But I can imagine, in this state, he was longing to eat pig food.

[10:45] And even that was not offered to him. But in verse 17, we're told, we are told in verse 17 that he came to himself.

This is the pivotal point in the trajectory of his life. He came to himself. This parable isn't a theological treatise on the manner of salvation.

But it does describe, in this language, that he came to himself. It described an awakening that was going on in the life of this younger son. And this awakening is brought about by the Holy Spirit. He realized, even in this state that he was in, that he's a miserable offender. There was an acceptance of his wrongdoing, which led to a determination to act.

Look at what is described there in verse 17 to 21. What is described there is, he came to himself and he remembers the goodness of his father. The plenty that was in his father's house.

[11:55] That even the hired servants have more than enough to eat. while he's perishing here in anger. And he made a determination, an awakening, an awareness of his state, of his rebellion, an acceptance of his failure and his sin, and then a determination to act.

And what's the action? To return to the father. To turn away and to turn back to the father. That's repentance in a nutshell.

And in verse 17 to 21, we see what true repentance looks like. In the larger context, as we remember the last two Sundays, we have been talking about repentance.

This is the point Jesus has been making to the people that have been coming to him in Luke, it's really since chapter 13 of Luke. He's been trying to tell us that only those who recognize their poverty, only those who recognize their utter dependence on God, knowing there is nothing they can offer to God, but yet they come to the rock that is Christ.

Only those kinds of people are the ones who find entrance into God's kingdom. kingdom. So the youngest son has come finally to a place of sorrow and regret over his sin.

[13:18] He remembers that in his father house there is assurance and love. He remembers now that as an outcast, his eyes have been fully opened to the love of the father.

And rather than perish, he resolved to go back home. And one wonders at this point why he would even contemplate a return home.

You can be sure, you can be sure that Satan is telling him, don't bother. That bridge has already been burned. What kind of fool do you take your father for?

Don't you remember the way you left? What you said? You can't go back home. You have no home. You're stuck with me.

Satan would have been telling him. As Satan tells us in the midst of our sin. And when we feel abject guilt and the weight of our sin is upon us. He compounds on that guilt and he accuses us.

[14:26] That's what Satan does. He first accuses you and tells a lie about God in order for you to turn away from God. And when you realize that all he's selling is actually a bill of goods that are worth nothing and then he tells you that a father is a retribute of God.

He's a condemning God. You're way beyond hope he tells you. And imagine the younger son is hearing this. But that's the remarkable thing about verse 17.

When he came to himself this implies that the hopeful tones of the gospel have started to take root and he's starting to remember the truth of the gospel of God.

The veil of darkness has been lifted. He remembers the father's love. He remembers the father's tender care. He remembers the relationship that was there before.

But he knows he knows he's forfeited any right. He knows he's forfeited any right.

[15:37] He doesn't come back demanding making demands but he comes resting on the kindness of his father. He rehearses in his head his heartfelt confession.

And he comes he determines to come in humility. He says I will arise I will arise I will arise yes yes and I will go to my father and I will say to him father I have sinned against heaven and I am before you I am no longer worthy I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Treat me as one of your hired servants. He comes asking to be a hired servant in the house of his father but he knows that it's better than death.

To be a hired servant in the house of his father is better than death. The Greek word for hired servants that miss does it actually means a hireling the lowest position in the household will have been the position of a hired servant.

He has to be a hired hand essentially like a day laborer with no job security that's what a day laborer is. There's work to be had the highest servant is hired and he's paid the day's wages there's no job security is a position dependent solely fully completely on the mercy of each day but he knows to be even granted that request is more than he deserves.

[17:21] He doesn't presume upon it rather he comes pleading and so in verse 20 we see not only has he contemplated this in his mind he finally acted upon it.

It would have meant nothing if he said all the things he said in verse 17 19 and 20 and determined to do it but then he doesn't act upon it. But in verse 20 he acted he arose and came to his father. But while he was still this is the beauty of this story here while he was still a long way off his father saw him his father not only saw him his father felt compassion and the father not only felt compassion the father ran and embraced him and kissed him can you imagine can you imagine the walk of shame the son was anticipating as he comes home he was dreading in his head the stern condemning look of the father whom he had wronged he was ready to eat whatever humble pie he was going to be served he was dreading but while he was still a long way off we're told the father saw the father felt compassion the father ran the father embraced him and the father kissed him the father was looking for this lost son the whole time do you wonder do you ever wonder how God feels towards you look here in this verses look in this picture of the father the father saw the father felt compassion this is

God's heart toward the sinner who comes in true repentance repentance this is God's heart always towards those who come to him in repentance he sees you he is full of compassion for you look at the reconciliation that takes place the father is the one who actually goes out to meet the son and it would have been a scandal to Jewish hearers to think of an elderly man not only an elderly man but an elderly man of this particular father's position a noble a well off man a respected man of high status to think of him to hike up his robe and to run in public would have been a scandal a shameful thing it's beneath him and for what for this this son this disgraced man to run to kiss him to embrace him the welcome alone in this story would have been enough for it was more than deserved it was more than the son deserved but as this lost son was you see there in verse 20 as he was confessing verse 21 as he was confessing his sins reciting his confession he's saying father father I have sinned against you I am no worthy no longer worthy to become your son he's not acknowledging his shame and he's not proposing he's proposing a new relationship of master and lowest servant I know I don't deserve to be your son proposing a new relationship the father cuts him off quickly the father says to his servants bring quickly the best robe put it on him put a ring on his end shoes on his feet bring the fattened calf kill it 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 they began to celebrate for as Jesus said in the earlier parables there is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents this is the celebration this is the picture of the celebration in heaven when a sinner comes home this kind of grace doesn't make sense it seems gratuitous doesn't it it seems vulgar even [21:57] I mean the grace of the father's bestowing here on the son seems too much undeserved gratuitous and vulgar even to the religious the religious that is human religiosity prides itself on climbing up by human effort to meet God's standard that's human religiosity that's the framework of every single human religion in the world you climb up to measure up to God to meet God's standard you want God's pleasure his kindness his favor then you need to perform and show yourself deserving of it but Jesus says here that those who are loved by the father are those who come naked helpless vile knowing they have nothing to offer yet crying out for mercy that's the difference between the religion that Christ comes to tell us of the gospel the relationship

Christianity this is what God offers look at the extravagant restoration of this lost son he was given every sign of favor and recognition the best robe signifying a return to a honored status he was given a ring it will be a signet ring a signet ring is a ring signifying a restoration to full authority as a son full sonship with the authority and privilege that that affords and he's given shoes for his feet he's no longer a slave and a servant a son doesn't go shoeless he's no father says kill the choices animal let us throw a party and celebrate this son who was dead is born again I want us to see that even in our 21st century culture we would be embarrassed by this display from the father and the religious people in Jesus day were embarrassed they were very embarrassed remember again the context of this story Jesus was eating and drinking at table with tax collectors and sinners and the Pharisees and scribes came and they said this is untoward this is not proper I wonder if the grace of God towards the repentant sinner is a scandal to us as well I think it's a scandal to the world out there they don't understand God's grace it's a scandal to the world what do you mean I don't have to do anything what do you mean

I just have to come as I am you mean he loves me and he just forgets everything and he just forgives no I I'm a good person I can earn my way that's the heart the rooted heart of men self righteousness and I think the word self righteousness is revealing in and of itself if we are honest the self righteous is not only whether there are self righteous found in the church in churches in

mosques in synagogues or any other religious house of worship there are self righteous people in all of those places but the self righteous cannot just as well be found in our day in the secular temples of our age in the academic halls of our universities in the entertainment establishment in the political fields in places of power and influence in the world we live in an age of prodigals who are deluded to think that they are elder brothers self righteous putting stock in their own self worth before

God instead of coming to God as this younger brother has done seeing him rightly as the compassionate and merciful father that he is instead they look at God as a tax master that's what the problem is with the other son here Jesus brings the other son into focus in this parable what do we see about him what's right about this son there are a lot to commend about this elder brother he was dutiful we can't deny that he was in in fact he was in the field at work working for his father and he came home to the sound of celebration and he called one of the house servants and demanded to know what was going on and the servant says matter of fact your father came home your father killed the father because he was receiving back safe and sound now this account of the father's receiving the younger brother enrages this older brother he was angry verse 28 tells us he was angry infuriated and refused to go in his father this is the heart of the father so you might know this isn't a matter of favored son against not favored son his love was keen for both sons the father came out we're told he came out of the celebration and then treated him the word there was he pleaded with his elder brother pleading that he might come in Jesus shows the heart of the father is just as tender and compassionate towards this elder brother as it was towards the younger brother he loves his children this father does and he yearns to have a relationship with all of them so here the father also goes out again he forgets all cultural conventions and expectations the father doesn't go out to the son but here this father does he goes out to this elder brother he pleads with him now we can understand why he was angry can't we this elder brother if you're the older brother in this scenario how would you feel it might be something if the father received this wayward son back as a hired servant but that's not what the father did he received him back as a son he gave him all that he had before it's too much the other brother is probably thinking and I want you to know that all the blessing that was given to this younger brother is actually the property of the elder son remember in the beginning the inheritance has been divided in those days the elder brother would have taken double the inheritance so if there were two sons two thirds of the property goes to the elder son the younger son gets a third of it and he had squandered his third the rest of the father's belongings the rest of the father's property the rest of the father's wealth belongs to this elder brother so he's looking this is all mine you're giving it away to this profligate ruinous disgraceful son of yours he says but the older brother in this anger reveals his true heart towards his brother and even towards his father as well remember

[30 : 20] look how he says this son of yours he's disown him he's no longer brother of mine notice that he accuses him he joins the Satan as the accuser he has devoured your property with prostitutes yet and then look at how he talks to the father I who has been beautiful you never even given me a young goat to celebrate with my friends do you see the stark contrast between the younger brother and the older brother we see it the older brother is beautiful attentive in the father's house the younger brother but in some ways also we see that there is actually not much different between them after all in fact in some ways the younger brother has a better relationship with the father he sees the father as he truly is he recognizes the father is a loving kind hearted merciful gracious father remember what he says even while he was in the far country my father my father

I will go to my father even while he knows he doesn't deserve anything as a son he still refers to him as my father look in these words of the older brother not once did he call the father his father! the relationship seems more of a master to a servant than a father to a son he says to his father I have served you this many years I was a dutiful and obedient servant and then he accused the father of stinginess that's not the picture we see of the father here the youngest son left home thinking true life and enjoyment can be had outside of the father zone but the old time this beautiful older brother is just as estranged from the father because the old time he had a transactional relationship with the father he does not know the heart of his father he does not share in the traits of his father despite his years of faithful labor in the father's house he doesn't even seem to share any of the family traits with the father in his very words he alienated himself from the family he says this son of yours he refuses to go in he plays the accuser he questions the father's mercy he questions the father's grace and benevolence towards this repentant son but look at the words of the father in

pleading to him the father still called him son the father stresses the relationship that's there the closeness and the proximity he enjoys he says you've always been with me the father says to him he says all that is mine is yours the father says to him i can't help but remember Jonah here in this in these passages at when at the end of of of Jonah as he grumbles at God's marvelous mercy towards Nineveh and God asked him do you do right to be angry that I spared these thousands of lives from destruction and Jonah says yeah yeah I'm angry I'm angry I'm furious that's what the elder brother is doing here as well angry at God's grace and mercy this parable ends with the elder brother standing outside the father's home this is the tragedy here it ends with the elder brother standing outside the home in anger refusing to come into the father's embrace and we're not told if he does come in so you see how this parable is really about two lost sons at the end of the story one is found and restored but the one who's been home all along might actually be the one that is truly lost the reality is that before

God the father almighty we all of us all of us are prodigals whether we are in the far country or in the house in truth we must all come to God like the youngest son did we have to come to him in true awareness of our sorry estate we have to come to him pleading for his mercy we can make no demands of God as the elder brother presumes to do but there is an elder brother there is an elder brother in reality who has been faithful in the father's house who has the father's heart and shares the father's trait and indeed everything the father has is his and after faithful obedience this elder brother has been given all that is rightfully his and unlike the elder brother in this parable this elder brother is not afraid to call us brother

[36 : 14] Jesus Christ is our elder brother he has succeeded faithfully and obeyed perfectly and loves just like the father does and because of his obedience because of his sacrificial love for us and love for the father and relationship with the father sharing the very traits in the heart of the father we all of us prodigal sons have been adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God so here's the mirror the mirror is focusing on you this morning whether you're in the far country and I know many of us know people in the far country some of us were been in the far country and we've been saved and we can resonate with this this love of the father and we know loved ones that are in the far country the father's plea is for you to come home and the father's cries for you to come home and so for us as well we have to share the heart of the father many of us are in church this morning so we know

God we probably can identify as well with the elder brother in some ways but how do we see those out there the prodigals who are in the far country whether they're family members or not do we deride them do we think them hopeless beyond God's mercy and grace or do we recognize that God is a loving father beckoning them to come home and do we echo!

this is the gospel of Jesus Christ if we are a church that rights people love and demeans God's grace we stop being the church of Christ so here's the mirror for us or maybe you are maybe you are on the father's estate but yet you are far off you are on the estate you are dutiful you come to church every Sunday you do the work or maybe you've been putting your confidence in that work and you think your relationship with God is a transactional one if I do this you'll give me that I deserve it he holds it to me maybe you don't know that God is a loving God you see him as a test master a kill joy you've bought into the lie of the devil that God is a kill joy you're not going to go off in the country you're just going to you know you recognize you're just a servant a slave to this God in fact God is asking for relationship of father to son with you you are my son the heart of God is open to you as well if you are the elder brother he wants to build a relationship with you to adopt you as true son on the merits on the merits not on your merits but on the merits of his beloved son Jesus Christ he wants!

you to come in to the house so the cry for us today come home the cry for us is to come in to the house and embrace the father as as the hope and why let us pray