

Two Bad Sons - One Generous Dad

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening everyone, my name is Matt, I'm a student at Ridley College and it's great to be with you tonight.

And I should say before I start that a lot of my thinking about tonight's passage, Luke 15, has been shaped by this book, it's called The Prodigal God by a guy called Tim Keller.

He's American, but he's Presbyterian so he's legit. So if you're looking for a good book to read over Christmas, perhaps to give to a non-Christian friend, this book very clearly explains the gospel and it's quite short if you have a look at it.

So I can really recommend this book, The Prodigal God, and you'll see some of how that shaped my thinking tonight. So I don't work for Coorong or Word, I don't get a commission, so feel free to buy it or don't.

And let me be upfront with you tonight and let you know where this talk is going. At the end of the talk, I'm going to pray a prayer. And if you're not a Christian but you'd like to become a Christian tonight, or perhaps tonight if you find out, if you realise tonight that you're not a Christian but would like to be, well I'd encourage you to pray this prayer with me at the end and Beck will come up and tell you what to do with that.

[1 : 1 5] And after the service, please come and see me because I'd love to hear about how tonight has affected you. So that's where this talk is going. I just thought I'd lay my cards on the table.

But first let me pray for us as we look at God's Word. Thank you great God for giving us Jesus' words in the Bible. Please help us to understand this parable tonight in Luke 15.

And by your Spirit, please change and transform our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen. I wonder if the conversations in your house are anything like the conversations in my house.

Where are my keys? Where are my socks? Where are my shoes? Where's my wallet? Where's my phone? I'm forever losing things. And I hate it. I absolutely hate losing things.

And if you're like me and you hate losing things, then you'll know that there is no greater joy than losing something and finding it again. Years ago, some friends and I were out in the city one weekend and I left my wallet accidentally in the backseat of this taxi.

[2 : 1 7] And it would be missing for a while and I was panicking because it had money in it, my cards and personal ID and stuff. And before I cancelled it, the taxi office, someone in the city rang and said that somebody had turned in my wallet intact.

And that doesn't happen very often. So there was just this feeling of relief that this thing that I'd lost had been found. And if you noticed how the greater value of the item lost, the greater the joy when you find it.

Like, you know, losing keys. You lose a set of keys and you might be a bit worried, might be a bit annoyed or frustrated, but then you find them again. You know, you might be inconvenienced a little bit.

You've got to call a locksmith or something to get you in, but you find them and it's okay. It's not too bad. But when you lose something like a wallet or a purse, well, that's a little bit more stressful, isn't it? It's a little bit more valuable.

You know, it's got your personal ID and credit cards and money and whatever. And there's this great fear when you lose a wallet or a purse that somebody is stealing your money. It becomes very worrying.

[3 : 22] But that's nothing. Because any parent or grandparent, auntie or uncle, or anyone who's minding a small child knows that when you lose a child in a shopping centre, that's absolutely terrifying, isn't it?

Because in the back of your mind, you know that it only takes just a couple of minutes for some child molester to take them by the hand and walk them out into a car, destroying their lives forever.

It's that gut-wrenching fear, isn't it? Losing a child in a shopping centre. Whether you've experienced it or you've seen it, what does a parent do when they lose a child in a shopping centre?

Well, they scream and they yell and they call security. And when they do, when they do find their little child, there's just this relief, isn't there? You know, the adrenaline stops pumping and the heartbeat stops pumping and you go to them and you cuddle them and hold them close and say, they're there, it's all right.

And you breathe deep again and then you want to kill them, but not really. Anyway, lost and found. It's a common human experience, isn't it? But more than that, when Jesus talks about humanity, human beings and their relationship with God, their creator, that's the language he uses, lost and found.

[4 : 38] And he makes the point most clearly in Luke 15, our passage tonight. Arguably Jesus' most famous parable, and I would say his most misunderstood parable, called the prodigal son.

Now, first of all, I want to clarify that it shouldn't be called the prodigal son because it's about two sons, not one. So look at what Jesus says in verse 11. If you grab a Bible, there should be one around you.

Luke 15, verse 11, he says, there was a man who had two sons. So you see, it's about two sons, not one. So if the Bible that you're reading has the heading something like the prodigal son or the parable of the lost son or something like that, it's wrong.

The Bibles you have with you in church, the NRSV, is a little bit close. It says the parable of the prodigal and his brother. That's close, but it's still a little misleading. So it should be called the two sons because that's what it's about.

It's about two sons, not one. So we're going to look at this parable in two halves tonight because it's about the two sons. And you can see all this on your outline sheet. Before we look more closely at the parable, let's work out why and to whom Jesus is telling this story.

[5 : 49] So look at verses 1 to 3. Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him and the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling, saying, this fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.

So he told them this parable. Okay, so here we have the context. There's Jesus and there's two groups or categories of people. First, there are the tax collectors and sinners. They're one group.

The other group is the Pharisees and the scribes. And these two groups are basically first century goodies and baddies. So let's reenact some history here.

I'm going to read those verses again. When I say tax collectors and sinners, I want you to all boo like there's a Collingwood supporter in the room. And when I say scribes and Pharisees, I want you to cheer. Okay, so I'll read it again.

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him and all the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling.

[6 : 47] Wow, I just felt like I was in the first century. That's transported me through time. That's incredible. So, okay, that's the picture. In the first century, there were these goodies and baddies. The tax collectors and sinners were the baddies and the Pharisees and scribes were the goodies, to put it simply.

So let's think about those two groups because the term tax collector here in Luke doesn't mean what we mean when we say tax collectors or, you know, the ATO today. So who were they?

Well, in the first century, Israel was occupied by the Romans. They were non-Jews. And the Old Testament had laws about how Jews were to mix or not mix with non-Jews. So there's this understanding in the ancient world that Jews were religiously clean and non-Jews were religiously unclean.

Now, tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman Empire and they were hated by their own people for a number of reasons. First, in doing business with the Romans, non-Jews, they were compromising and even breaking some of these clean and unclean restrictions and guidelines.

They had to, right, in order to do business. So there's this clean and unclean issue going on. Then they were collecting taxes for the very people oppressing them. So think of perhaps a Jew or a Polish person in World War II collecting taxes for the Nazis.

[8 : 05] They would be hated by their own people. So there's that going on as well. And then thirdly, they made a profit from their collecting, a little bit on the side that went for themselves. And they lived quite comfortably from it.

So not only were they corrupt, but they were greedy as well. So for all of these reasons, tax collectors were seen in the first century as absolute scumbags.

They were considered the lowest of the low. They were hated. And the term sinners there in verse 1, well, that was just a general derogatory term for people who weren't religiously devout or clean.

So that's the first group, tax collectors and sinners. They're the one group. The other group is the scribes and Pharisees. Now, these were the upright, conservative, moral, God-fearing Jewish religious leaders.

They studied and memorized the Bible. They prayed. They fasted. They committed themselves to being moral and upright and God-fearing. To the Pharisees, a relationship with God, well, it's like the Olympics.

[9 : 05] You've got to perform and make the grade in order to win the medal. And if you don't make the grade, well, that's too bad. You're out. Heaven is not for you. So that's the scribes and Pharisees. These are two groups or categories of people that we're introduced to at the start of Luke 15.

On one side, there's tax collectors and sinners, the dirty, corrupt, immoral, non-religious people. And on the other side, there's the Pharisees and scribes, the God-fearing, conservative, church-going, youth-leading, moral, religious, Bible college student guys.

And Jesus, verses 1 and 2, is hanging out with who? Tax collectors and sinners. Which for the scribes and Pharisees is a problem.

Because so far in Luke's gospel, Jesus has been announced as the Christ or the king of the world. He's come from God to earth to speak and act on God's behalf.

He has God's power and authority because he's from God and he is God. So the Pharisees have this problem because they know their Bibles. They know that God is holy and he hates sin and he punishes sinners.

[10 : 17] So their logic is, if Jesus is from God, if Jesus is the one who speaks and acts on behalf of God, why is he schmoozing with the very people who reject God and whom God condemns?

Why is Jesus hanging out with the very people who want nothing to do with God at all? Well, what's Jesus' response? In verse 3, he tells a parable. In fact, he tells three parables or three stories.

We're skipping the first two because we're going to focus on this third story tonight, the two sons. But Jesus tells three stories. And they're all linked with a common theme, lost and found.

That's the language used in all three stories about the sheep, the coin and the sons. Something is lost and the owner goes after it, finds it and is rejoicing. That's what the stories in summary are about.

Something lost and found again. And put simply, Jesus is teaching about God and people. His message is that God loves and seeks and finds sinners, lost people.

[11 : 26] But the question is, who are the lost? Because Pharisees and scribes, well, they hear these parables and they think, well, it's a good thing he's not talking about me. Pharisees and scribes think that lost people are those people over there, those bad people in that race or group of people or that suburb.

So Jesus is telling this story about lost and found, but this story with the sons has a twist. So let's look at it together, beginning in verse 11. There was a man who had two sons.

So if you look at this outline, we're going to see in this story, there's two sons. One is a rule breaker. The other is a rule keeper. Let's look at the first son, verses 12 to 24. What does he do?

The younger son said to his father, Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me. What's he saying? He's saying, Dad, I wish you were dead. See, in the ancient world, a father divided his inheritance up between his sons and gave them the share of his wealth and property before he passed away or when he passed away.

But this arrogant young man, he marches up to his dad and he says, Whatever I'm going to get when you die, give it to me now. See, he doesn't want to wait around for his old man to die.

[12 : 42] Life's too short. He's not going to wait 40 years or 30 years or even 10. He wants his stuff now. So this statement from the young son, it is rude, it is insulting, it is shocking.

And the point is, he doesn't love his father. He loves his father's stuff. His dad is just a means to an end to get wealth, money, power. So he rocks up to his dad and he says, Dad, I wish you were dead.

Give me your stuff. I'm out of here. And the father generously gives it to him. And then what happens? Verse 13. A few days later, the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country.

There squandered his property in dissolute living. Some translations have wild or reckless. It's what the word prodigal means. It means to spend like there's no tomorrow.

That's what he does. He takes all his cash overseas and he spends his wealth, his inheritance, on wild living. He does a Brendan Favola and he becomes a party boy. Clubs, nightclubs, brothels we later find out in verse 30.

[13 : 48] This is sex, drugs and rock and roll, man. It's like schoolies on steroids. In verse 13, he says he goes overseas to a distant country. Maybe you went to Bali like some of the schoolies did if you've been watching TV lately.

But no, you don't go to Bali. Where are the best clubs? It's Greek islands, man. You go to the Greek islands. Could be. But no, if you really want to party, where do you go? You go to Vegas.

You go to Vegas, baby. Why? Vegas is called the city of? City of sin. Well, wherever he goes, he goes to a distant country and then something tragic happens.

Verses 14 and 15. He squandered his wealth in wild living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country and he began to be in need.

So all of a sudden, the \$100 notes he's throwing down at the casino table suddenly become 50s, which after a while become 20s, and then 10s, and then 5s, and then loose change, and in the end he has blown everything.

[14 : 56] He's broke. And there's a famine. He is totally and utterly stuffed. He's broke, without food, without shelter.

He's in a foreign country, abandoned by friends who hung around with him when he had cash, but now they're gone. He's stuffed. And implicit here is a sense that he can't go back to his father.

He's well and truly burned that bridge. He told his dad to get lost and blew all his money on wine and women and whatever else. He's a disgrace and an embarrassment, to say the least.

He's insulted his father's reputation and his entire family. And if you're like me from an Anglo-Aussie background, that probably doesn't mean much to you. But you ask anyone from an Asian background or a Middle Eastern background, and the worst thing that can happen is to insult your father's reputation, your family's reputation.

And that's what he's done. The implication is there's no way he can go back home. What he's done and what he's become is just too shameful. He's gone too far.

[16 : 02] All he has is memories of his life back with his father. But memories don't fill an empty stomach, do they? So what does he do?

Verse 15 and 16. Well, things have really gone from bad to worse for this guy.

He's broke, hungry, homeless. So he hires himself out to someone to work with his pigs, which, by the way, no self-respecting Jew would ever do, because according to Judaism, pigs are an unclean animal.

But this guy is such a disgrace, he figures, well, I can't disgrace myself anymore, can I? So he goes and works with the pigs. And he soon realizes that the pigs are getting treated better than he is. Now, just so you know, you have officially hit rock bottom when you look at what a pig's eating and say, I'll have what he's having.

You have officially hit rock bottom when that has happened. And so this son works out that he's not being treated any good at all. He doesn't get the food and shelter and warmth he desperately needs.

[17 : 17] So he says in verse 17, How many of my father's hands or workers have bread to spare? And here I am dying of hunger. I will get up and go to my father and say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men. So he heads back home. And as he's walking the long trek home, this guy rehearses and practices his apology scenario with his dad, you know, in his head.

He's got this script to work out. He's got a financial plan. He's got a spreadsheet of how it's going to work out, five cents a day and over 50 years. He'll pay whatever it is. He's working this. He's got a system worked out. And the question now, I think, there's this tension here is, how is his dad going to respond?

Or how could his dad respond? A couple of ways. One, gets home. His dad says nothing. Slams the door in his face. And calls the police to take his bum, this bum away.

His father could disown him. That's fair, isn't it? Son walked out on him. Said, you're dead to me. That's fair, isn't it? The dad turns to him and says, well, okay, you're dead to me. And disown him.

[18 : 31] That's one possibility. Or the dad could say, could look him in the eye and say, okay, you come back. I won't kick you out. But you listen to me.

I will never, ever forgive you for what you've done. What you've done to me and to this family. You'll live in the shed with the other workers. You'll eat what they eat.

You'll work when they work. You've disgraced me so badly that you're going to pay back every cent. And I never want to speak about this again. That could be what the father says.

It's what you might expect. But friends, the father does neither of those things. Look at verse 20. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion.

He ran, put his arms around him and kissed him. That's beautiful, isn't it? Notice that the father saw him a long way off. How do you see someone a long way off unless you're looking for them?

[19 : 36] His dad has been looking, waiting with anticipation for his son to return. He doesn't stand at the porch, arms crossed, tapping his toe, waiting for his son to crawl back on his hands and knees, scraping on the dirt like a dog.

No, he's filled with compassion and he runs to his son, which no self-respecting Middle Eastern man ever did. It was considered inappropriate and rude. Older men, dignified wealthy men, only ever walked.

If they needed something in a hurry, they got a servant to do it for them. But this father doesn't care. He's so overwhelmed with love and compassion for his son that he runs to him and kisses him and hugs him.

And with all this affection and love and embracing, the son does apologize. Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. But it's like the father doesn't even hear it.

He's too busy embracing him. And the father says, verse 22, This is a beautiful picture, isn't it?

[20 : 54] The father doesn't treat his rebellious son with hostility and anger and condemnation. No, he demonstrates unexpected, unobligated love and compassion and mercy and forgiveness.

Friends, the Bible sums up the father's reaction here in one word. It is grace. It's grace. Grace is unmerited favor.

Favor or kindness from someone that you didn't earn or deserve. Grace isn't justice. Justice would demand that the son pay the father back every cent.

But grace says, no, no, I'll pay. The father pays the cost himself to welcome his son home. And more than that, he treats his son like royalty. This son clearly doesn't deserve any favorable treatment at all.

It freely comes out of the father's compassion and love and kindness. It is grace. What's Jesus doing telling this story? Well, remember back at the start, there's Jesus and two groups of people.

[22 : 01] There's tax collectors and sinners. Why does Jesus hang out with them? Why does he befriend them? It's the point of the story, isn't it? It's grace. Jesus acts like the father in the parable.

He acts like God. Jesus is from God. So he acts like God. He's compassionate and kind and forgiving and merciful. He loves lost people.

He has come for them. But we'll hear a little bit more about that at the end. These ratbags and these sinners, they're like the young son in the story.

Yeah, they've rejected God. Clearly, we can see that. But Jesus' message is that God loves them. God wants sinners in his family. God is willing and eager to pay the cost to forgive sinners.

That's why Jesus is with them. He's acting just out of his nature. It's grace. And it's like this story that Max Licato tells about a woman named Maria and her daughter Christina.

[23 : 07] Now, if you've heard this story, that's okay. You can just listen in. But if you haven't heard this story, it's just incredible. Max Licato tells this story and it goes like this. Longing to leave her poor Brazilian neighborhood, teenage Christina wanted to see the world.

One morning, she ran away from home, breaking her mother's heart. Her mother knew what life on the streets would be like for her young, attractive daughter. So Maria packed her bags, emptied all her savings account, took all her money with her to go find her daughter.

On her way to the bus stop, she went to a pharmacy for one last thing. She went into the photo booth, closed the curtain and spent all the money she had on pictures of herself. You know, those little passport pictures.

With her purse full of small black and white photos, she got on the next bus to the bustling city, Rio de Janeiro. Maria knew that young girls with no jobs or family in the city turned to the sex trade in order to survive.

Heartbroken and longing to see her, Maria began her search. She went into every bar, hotel, nightclub, any place with a reputation for street walkers or prostitutes.

[24 : 17] At each place, she left a picture taped on a bathroom mirror or a hotel bulletin board, a bus terminal or a phone booth outside. And on the back of every photo, she wrote the same message.

It wasn't too long before Maria ran out of photos and so she went back home to her village waiting for her daughter. Weeks later, Christina was coming down the stairs after one more night in the brothel she was working in.

Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. And she longed to trade all those countless beds with men for one night safe under her mother's roof.

As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again and there in the mirror in the lobby was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo.

She picked it up and looked at it and written on the back in her mother's familiar handwriting was this message. She said, Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter.

[25 : 31] Please come home. And Christina went home. That's a beautiful story, isn't it? Whatever you've done, whatever you've become, it doesn't matter.

Please come home. That is grace. That's what Jesus says about God and sinners in this story.

That God is full of mercy and compassion and grace. And whoever you are, whatever you've become, Jesus says, please come home. Friends, I don't know your life.

I don't know your story. I don't know you from a bar of soap. But if there are things that you have done and said for which you are ashamed and you think God wouldn't ever forgive you, Jesus' message in this story is that God is full of compassion and kindness and mercy.

God wants to forgive. God pays the cost to forgive. He doesn't make you pay. He pays. God will embrace you into his family, wholeheartedly, whatever it is.

[26 : 40] Jesus' message to you is, please come home. And I'm going to give you an opportunity to do that tonight. But let's continue. As amazing as the love and grace of the father is for this first son, it's not where the story ends.

So remember verse 11. It's about two sons. We've seen the first son, the rule breaker, so to speak. What about the other son, the older brother, the one who stayed at home, the rule keeper?

Surely he must be looking pretty good right now, right? Well, let's see. Verse 25. The older brother is in the field. Where is he? Is he out looking for his brother? I don't know about you, but if you lost a brother or sister, would that mean anything to you?

Is he like the father looking desperately for his brother to welcome him home? No, he's in the field. It's just another day at the office. And he doesn't even go in the house.

Look at verses 25 and 26. When he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. Does he go in? No. He called one of the slaves, the household servants, and asked him what was going on.

[27 : 43] He replied, Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he's got him back safe and sound. What's the older brother's response? Does he go in and kiss his brother and embrace him?

Is he overjoyed? Is he overjoyed? Verse 28. He became angry. This guy is livid. He's furious. But the father graciously comes out to deal with his son.

The son doesn't go in to speak to his dad. The son doesn't go in to speak to his dad, but his dad comes out. And look at how the older brother speaks to him. Verse 29. He says, Listen, Listen, All these years I've been working like a slave for you.

What does he call himself? He calls himself a slave. What's his relationship? How does he see his relationship with his father? It's not of a father and son. It's of a slave, a worker, an employee.

He's an employee there to do a job. That's how he sees himself. He says, I've never disobeyed your command. You have never given me even a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

[28 : 46] What's he saying? Work like a slave, never disobeyed. It's all about merit. He doesn't see himself as a son. He sees himself as a slave. He relates to his father on the basis of merit, reward.

He's saying, I've been good. I've kept the rules. You're supposed to reward me. That's how the merit system works, isn't it? Do good, get good. Do bad, get bad. He's saying, I've kept the rules.

I've done good. Look at what I've done, Dad, and reward me accordingly. You haven't given me what I deserve. See, that's not grace. That's merit. And he goes on, verse 30.

But when this son of yours... Notice he doesn't say, my brother. He distances himself. It's almost like he's pointing the finger at the dad. This son of yours. This is your fault. This is your problem.

Not mine. When this son of yours, the son who, what? Devoured your property with prostitutes. You killed the fattened calf for him.

[29 : 49] Can you hear how angry this brother is? How arrogant he is? How ungrateful he is? How spiteful? How disrespectful he is?

See, the problem with focusing this story on the first son is it doesn't identify the problem of the other son. The sins of the younger brother, well, they're easily identifiable.

He runs away. He's greedy. He's selfish. He has sex with prostitutes. He's the black sheep of the family. He's the bad kid, the rule breaker. He's obviously a mess who needs forgiveness. What about this guy?

When you look at what the other brother says, he's every bit as arrogant and selfish and ungrateful and disrespectful as the first. Remember Jesus has this story with two groups of people in mind.

The first group of people, the tax collectors and the ratbag sinners. They're like the younger son. But remember there's scribes and Pharisees as well, the religious leaders. Who are they in this story?

[30 : 50] Or which son are they in this story? It's the older brother, the rule keeper, the one who thinks that they're the obedient, rule keeping moralist.

When you see what Jesus says about this older brother, he's really having a go at religious people. Jesus tells this story about two sons for a reason.

He's being deliberately provocative and he's pushing people. This parable is saying that there are two ways of rejecting God or the father. One way is to spit in his face and to run away and to break all these rules.

Sex, drugs, rock and roll, whatever. To be very, very bad. The other way to reject the father is to be very, very good. To be a religious person. To regard yourself as good and moral.

To relate to God on the basis of your own personal merit. Whatever it is. Church attendance, keeping the Ten Commandments, keeping the Golden Rule, you know, do unto others. Religious people reject God because they act as their own Lord and Saviour.

[31 : 54] Religion, for religious people, religion is all about what you do for God. To get him to favour and bless you. Not about what he's done for you. It's about giving God your works, your deeds, your performance.

It's not about receiving God's mercy in Jesus. And because religion is based on your own performance and merit, it inevitably leads to pride and arrogance, to bitterness and superiority over other people.

Because if your salvation depends on you keeping the rules, you will always look down on those who aren't. That's the problem with religion. That it's not humble, thankful, gracious, selfless.

It is totally arrogant and proud and self-centred. Jesus tells this story for a reason. Because older brothers are every bit as lost as the younger brothers.

Every bit as arrogant, every bit as selfish, every bit as ungrateful. But it looks okay because he's being such a good boy. Or while he thinks he's being a good boy. He's not the embarrassing black sheep of the family with a criminal record.

[32 : 59] Jesus is being very, very provocative here. He's saying, you religious people, you haven't got a clue. You haven't got a clue at all. Jesus attacks religion in this story and religious people's identity as being good, God-fearing, moralistic people.

And do you notice at the end of the story, which of the two sons are in the father's house? The rule-breaker is, he's come back.

He's inside partying. But where is the rule-keeper? Well, we don't know exactly. I mean, it's implicit. Jesus leaves us hanging. He doesn't say. But it is clear that the rule-breaking son, well, he repents and he embraces the father's mercy and he comes home.

Where's the older brother? What's Jesus' point? He's saying, those who embrace and receive the father's mercy and forgiveness, they're welcomed into his family.

And those who don't, they aren't. Notice again, how gracious the father is all through the story. Gives the estate. He comes out to the, he embraces the rebellious son.

[34 : 07] He calms down and he talks to the younger, to the older brother. Just how gracious he is. How does he talk to the older brother at the end? Verse 29. Look at what he says.

Sorry, in verse 31. He calls him son. Once again, the father doesn't put a disrespectful son over his knee and belt them for their disrespect and ungratefulness.

He calls him son, not slave. He says, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours.

Remember he distanced himself earlier? He reminds him, this brother of yours, the father says, this brother of yours was dead and has come to life. He was lost and is found.

See, this story isn't about goodies and baddies, good people and bad people. Jesus is actually shattering the notion that there are two types of people in the world, goodies and baddies.

[35 : 05] There's not. There's not goodies and baddies in the world. According to the Bible, there's only baddies and Jesus. And if you're not Jesus, you're not a goodie.

Jesus is the only goodie. And the good news is he died for the baddies to forgive them, bring them into his family to make them goodies. So as I said earlier, this parable isn't about the one son.

There's two sons in this story and they're both wrong. The first son is wrong in being a selfish rebel, rejecting the father. But the second son is also wrong because he relates to the father on the basis of merit, personal obedience.

And that's how religious people relate to God and Jesus says, it's wrong. How do we know? Well, we need to leave the story of the two sons for a moment and travel a few chapters later in Luke's gospel.

You don't have to look it up. I'll summarize it. It's Luke chapter 23 and Jesus is hanging on a cross. He's being put to death and with him are two criminals, also being crucified.

[36 : 09] One mocks him and the other doesn't. The criminal turns to Jesus and says, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And this criminal clearly has no chance of doing any good works to make up for any of his sins.

He can't go to church, can't help old ladies across the road, he can't go to confession, he can't do any good works to somehow merit God's favor. The fact that he's being crucified suggests that he's done something bad.

And here he is, you know, he hasn't lived a moral life, never will, he's nailed to a cross. All he does is turn to Jesus and put his trust in Jesus that Jesus is dying a death not that he deserved but that the criminal deserved.

All he does is put his hope for heaven entirely upon Jesus and Jesus says, you'll be with me in paradise. Really? What's he done?

Does he go to church? Was he baptized? Did he see the Pope when he came out? What kind of, is he a good moral person? No. He simply trusts in Jesus and it's a done deal because it's grace.

[37 : 20] It's a gift. That's where this parable of the two sons points us to, to the cross. Where Jesus, the son of God, dies in our place for bad rebellious people and for bad religious people.

You see, we're all in the same boat. We're all baddies. We've all stuffed up our relationship with God. Some of us through rebellion. And you know who you are. But the rest of us through religion and moralism.

They're both wrong. See, Christianity isn't about moralism or immoralism. It's about something completely and utterly different. It's about grace. It's about Jesus.

The Christ, the king of the world, God's son, taking our place on the cross, dying in our place, bearing our sins, our mistakes, and our selfish attempts at moralism, taking the punishment we deserve on the cross, being condemned by God instead of us, and by rising to new life to reconcile us to God, to make whoever trusts in Jesus, a child, a son, or a daughter of God.

This parable of the two sons in Luke 15 is amazing. Two bad sons, but one generous, merciful father. So for rebels who've run from God, Jesus' message is, come home.

[38 : 44] Trust in his death on the cross for you. You don't have to earn it or make up for it. Jesus paid for your sins in his death and resurrection, and the forgiveness of God, it's a gift.

Whatever you've done, whatever you've become, please come home. And to the religious person, the older brother, Jesus' message is, you don't get it, do you?

You think you're in God's family because you sit in a building on Sunday, but really you're out in the field. It's not about rules. It's about grace. It's not about you, how fabulous and moral and intelligent and good-looking you are.

It's about Jesus and his death on the cross in your place for all of it. You need to humble yourself before the living God and say, I cannot do it.

Even my goodness you don't want. It means facing the reality that you are incapable of doing what God asks and simply relying entirely on Jesus for mercy and forgiveness.

[39 : 56] So let me ask you, which son in this story are you? Are you a rule-breaking rebel? Are you a rule-keeping older brother? Tonight the message is grace.

Jesus' death on the cross pays for it all and you pay for none of it and you can have it. Not by cleaning up your act, being a good person, going to church more, leading youth group.

By trusting Jesus. Jesus says, probably the most famous verse in the Bible, that God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever, what, goes to church, helps old ladies, no, whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

So, will you come home? Please, let me beg and urge you tonight, please, come home. And if you'd like to do that, I'm going to pray a prayer.

The words are on your outline. If you would like to come home tonight to God the Father by trusting Jesus and please echo this prayer.

[41 : 12] I'll say a line of it and then you can say it yourself to God in your own mind. Father God, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

Thank you for sending your son Jesus to die on the cross in my place for my sins. Taking my punishment in full. Thank you for raising Jesus from the dead as Lord to forgive my sins and bring me into your kingdom.

help me to now live relying on what Jesus has done. Making me your child.

Help me to now live trusting and obeying Jesus as my king. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.