Luke 15:1-10 AM

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[0:00] Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen. You may be seated. And if you could please join me in Luke chapter 15.
Once again, this can be found on page 874 in your pew Bibles. I once had the privilege about 10 years ago of going to my first Chinese wedding banquet.
I had no idea what I was in for. After about the fourth course, I was getting worried that I was not going to be able to keep up. The groom came up to me because I had done the wedding, so he's interested.
He really wanted to know, was I enjoying the meal? And I was like, it's truly amazing. I mean, honestly, it's like nothing I've ever had before. And I said, but one question, how many courses is this meal? And he said, it's 10 courses.
[1:05] And I was starting to get worried. It's a little bit like, the Gospel of Luke is a little bit like that. It's so much more grace than we can ever anticipate. And there's so much to it that we start to wonder, can I really feast on all of it?

And as we come to chapter 15 in Luke, we discover that Jesus is now serving up the main course. Everything after it's going to be dessert, and everything before it has just been an appetizer. Preparing us, wetting our appetites for what Jesus is offering here. And we're told in verses 1 and 2 that Jesus serves the main course in response to complaints about his dinner guests.
Jesus' ministry and his message at this moment were magnetic. They were drawing all sorts of people from all corners and walks of life. And yet, certain religious leaders and Bible teachers were thinking that the people that Jesus was attracting were the wrong sorts of people.
So in verse 1, So the main issue that all three parables of chapter 15 are a response to is how Jesus receives and relates to sinners.
[2:21] And Jesus' response in these parables takes us straight to the heart of Christianity. It takes us to the heart of what makes the Christian faith different from every other religion. And in all three parables and stories, Jesus makes essentially one point.

He wants to show the extravagance of his love for the lost. See, Luke is the gospel for the lost. On the cross, Jesus is the savior of the lost.
In the parables that we find in Luke chapter 15, Jesus, it's all about his joy in finding and loving the lost. So each parable is going to be essentially about two things. These are the two takeaways for this morning.
It is lostness and love. Notice there's one lost sheep. There's one lost coin. And I want to suggest there are two lost sons. And what Jesus is saying in this chapter, he's saying there are multiple ways to be lost.
You can be self-centered or you can be self-righteous. But it's all to say you're lost. So that's the first theme. And the second thing that Jesus talks about is the madness of God's love.
[3:22] He is willing to be like the shepherd who leaves all 99 sheep to go after the one. Who stays up all night. A woman staying up all night to search for the one coin because it's so urgent it can't wait for morning.

Like the father who goes looking for his one lost son and then leaves the party for his one lost son to go after his other lost son. Throughout we see not only the madness of our lostness but the madness of Jesus' love for us.

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And so the plan for this morning is really simply this. I want to take a lot of time to walk us through the parable of the prodigal. So that's verses 11 through 32. And then I want to wrap back to these two themes.
The madness of our lostness and the madness of his love. Does that sound alright? You guys ready for this? Alright. Alright. The word prodigal.
It means someone who is reckless in the way they spend their money. It means someone who is wastefully extravagant in their giving and spending. I heard an interview with somebody on one of these late night shows.
[4:29] They interview all these famous people that people want to hear from this last week. And this person was asking this famous person, Is it true that you once spent five million dollars in one day? And this whole interview was revolving around how reckless this person's spending was.

That's what it means to be prodigal. And most people when they come to this parable think that prodigal refers primarily to the younger son. Who takes all the father's stuff and goes and wastes it away.
But in this story I want to suggest to you that prodigal actually refers primarily to the father. It is the father that is prodigal over and over and over again. His reckless extravagance and love towards his son.
And so in the story the younger son doesn't become lost. I want to suggest when he leaves home and spends all his father's money. He's lost from the very beginning the second he opens his mouth.
So in verse 12. The younger son of them said to his father. Father give me the share of my property that is coming to me.
[5:32] His request is a total rejection of his father. We have to understand that in the ancient world. Sometimes as often as it is in our own still. The father's property and possessions only would have been divided among his sons after his death.

So by the son requesting his share of the inheritance now before his father's death. The younger son is essentially saying father you are dead to me. It's hard to imagine how hurtful and insulting this would have been in that culture.
It would have been grounds in the ancient Middle East for excommunicating his son from the family altogether. Simply for his request. But did you notice the nature of the request in verse 12.
What does the son want from the father? He says father give me property. It's a request that's not uncommon in Vancouver. He's essentially saying I want your stuff but I don't want you.
And it takes us straight to the heart of sin. Wanting the father's gifts without wanting the father. Wanting to enjoy all the good things in life that God provides for us without enjoying God himself.
And do you notice what the father does?
[6:41] This is where the father is starting to be prodigal. Right away in verse 12. And he divided his property between them. The father fulfills the ridiculous request of the younger son. The father acts as if he were dead.

And he gives his life. His life's work away. Over to the son. It's a reckless act of generosity. In the ancient Near East people would have thought the son's request is insane.
But the father giving him a son's request. That is doubly insane. And so having insulted his father in the deepest possible way. This younger son takes his money.
Goes into a far country. Squanders everything that he has in reckless living. And then a famine comes. And he's utterly destitute. Has nothing to be able to deal with it. He who had no need for his father now finds himself desperately in need.
So much so that he hires himself out to a pig farmer. Now remember Jesus is telling the story to Jewish leaders and preachers. Gentiles are unclean.
[7:44] He's in a foreign country. And pigs are unclean. And the younger son now works for a Gentile. And he feeds pigs. I heard one preacher describe it like this.

That I was listening to this week. It'd be like your younger son calling you after he had gone away to university. Excited to tell you that he had finally found a job to pay for his own living. He was going to be able to pay his own way.
And when you ask him with excitement, what job are you doing? He says to you, I'm a male prostitute. It's that shocking. That's what he's doing here.

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For a Jewish audience, essentially this younger son had sold his soul to the devil. He hit rock bottom. He had been given everything in a reckless act of generosity from the father.
And now in verse 16, we see that no one gave him anything. And it was only at this point that the son finally starts to come to his senses. And unfortunately, that's so often what's true for us, right?
[8:46] We have to hit rock bottom in some way to finally wake up and start coming to our senses.
And so the son starts preparing his I'm sorry speech. Verse 18.

He says, Now before you start thinking that the younger son has had this change of heart and all his motives are now becoming true and right, notice the reason that he gives for his repentance in verse 17 right before it.
In verse 17, he says, But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough to eat? But I perish here with hunger.
So there's the sense that even his repentance is somewhat selfishly motivated. He wants to return to the father, not because he wants to be with the father, but once again because of what the father can give him.
He's scared for his life, and he wants what his father can offer him. And so he goes back. He's still living in this me-centered mentality. I want your stuff, but I don't want you.
[10:00] I want what you can provide, but I don't want your presence. And that's what makes what the father does next so astonishing and reckless once again. The father does not hesitate one second.

Once he sees his son, he runs immediately to him. He did not wait for his son to come out of his self-centeredness before embracing him.
He did not wait for his son to start his I'm sorry speech. Rather, it was while his son was still a long way off. Notice the language there. His son is still lost. He's starting to come out of his lostness, but he's still lost.
He's in the country of sin and sadness, and the father saw him and felt compassion on him and ran and embraced him and kissed him. It's what Paul says elsewhere. God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
And the key word here is compassion. Jesus uses this word to describe what he feels at the sight of a lost sinner.
[11:04] It's a word that literally refers to one's bowels or one's guts or one's innards, the deepest inner parts of a human being. Jesus' inner being moves with compassion for the lost.

He embraces them before they can even begin their I'm sorry speech and understand how lost they are. And I think this reveals two very important things about repentance to us.
First, repentance does not initiate or earn God's forgiveness. Rather, repentance is the response to the embrace of God's forgiveness.
As one author put it, repentance is not the cause of God's love. God's love is the cause of our repentance. And the second thing that we learn about repentance is that even in our repentance, God wants so much more for us than we ever could imagine wanting for ourselves.
Some of you have heard my story before that one of the key turning points in my faith is when I was 16 years old. I kind of started down this path when I was 14, 15, beginning the path of reckless living.
[12:12] And on a boxing day, when I was 16 years old, my father finally sat me down and he just said two sentences to me. He said, Jordan, I know how you are living. Second sentence. I want you to know that God wants so much more for you.

Did you notice in verse 21 that the son never had the chance to finish his I'm sorry speech? This is the great difference between his rehearsal and the actual thing.
It's that the father cuts him off. So he's right in the middle of his I'm sorry speech. And right when he says, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son, the father says, I've heard enough. And the father sends the servant to fetch the best family robe and family ring and family shoes, to kill the fattened calf and to start the party.
And then in verse 24, he says, for this, my son was dead and is alive. He was lost. And now he's found. See, the father doesn't even let his son finish his I'm sorry speech, because what the son is going to ask for is so much lower than what the father wants to give him.
And so he just cuts him off. And we would discover right here that God is on the lookout, not for servants primarily, but for sons and daughters. Even our repentance, God wants more for us than

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we want for ourselves.
[13:31] God does not receive us back and say, you need to hold on in purgatory for a little bit or be on probation. I want to see if you've finally gotten your act together, if you've finally learned your lesson.

He just embraces as soon as he sees us. As soon as he sees you in your misery and shame, he runs immediately. He forgives immediately. He embraces immediately.
He clothes and cleanses and celebrates immediately. And he makes us his children again immediately. So at the beginning, the son said to his father, I want your stuff, and I don't want you. And now the father says to the son, I don't want your service, but I want you. The father here is meant by Jesus to be a symbol of his own mission and ministry in the world.
Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and the scribes as they are grumbling about Jesus receiving and eating with sinners. And as it was then, so it is now. Jesus has no pride in associating with sinners.
[14:32] He does not feel the need to hold a cool, calm distance and to save face and to hold up some sort of veneer of holiness. He is free and he is reckless with his love. He is truly prodigal.

And it was the seemingly wasteful extravagance that the older son finds so offensive. When I was 18 years old, my brother was 16 at this point, and he accidentally drove his car into my parents' family room.
So my brother had one of these big Jeeps with really big wheels that was made for going over really big rocks. And every morning, instead of getting in the car, he would lean in, press the clutch in, and start the car, let the clutch out, and then go inside and let the car warm up for a few minutes before he got into it.
And one morning, he forgot to put his car in neutral before he did that. And so the car leapt forward. It went up three stairs in front of the house over a little patio, crashed through walls of windows, hit the couch, and pushed the couch into the middle of the family room, and then it stalled.
And my father was upstairs shaving. He heard the crash, felt the house shake. It's in California, so it could be an earthquake or something.
[15:53] He went out on the balcony, and he looked down and saw the end of my brother's car sticking out of the house. And he said to my brother, who was absolutely petrified, trembling with fear, he said, looks like you need to stay home today to clean up the house.

And then he went back inside, finished shaving, got in the car, and went to work. He called a carpenter, said, you're going to need to come fix the house.
And he did not make my brother pay a single dollar. My dad called me up to tell the story, and he was laughing uproariously. And I was furious.
I'm the oldest son. Literally, in our family. I was furious because my brother was not getting what he deserved. How reckless could he possibly be?
I was furious that he was not paying for it, that he was not being held accountable, that he was not being disciplined. It's not fair. I've never done anything like this, and I would never think of doing anything like this.
[17:04] How does he get away with it? How can dad foot the bill? How can he let it go? You see what was happening in my heart? As an 18-year-old?

If my brother does not get what he deserves, then I will not get what I deserve. If my brother is not punished for his actions, held accountable for his actions, then I will not be rewarded for mine.
Look, says the older son to his father in a stern, rebuking voice in verse 29. These many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.
Do you hear the anger in his voice? I've built my whole life on this, Father. And now you're just turning it all upside down. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.
But when this son of yours, this son of yours, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him. See, in this parable, Jesus reveals that there are two ways to be lost.
[18:15] You can be like the younger son and just live in total self-centeredness. Or you can be like the older son and live in the heights of self-righteousness. And either way, the father has no pride in the way he responds to you.

Wherever you've been, whatever you've done, whatever kind of sin, he just says, please come home. He embraces the younger son, come home. He goes out to the older son, come home.

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And this leads us to the two takeaways that I mentioned at the very beginning. That all three parables are about two things. The madness of our lostness.
And the madness of Jesus' love. The madness of our lostness. The biggest scandal of Christianity is not its exclusivity, brothers and sisters.
It is God's generosity. We have a prodigal God. How generous he is seems reckless. It's something that a self-centered, irreligious person cannot fathom.
[19:12] And it's also something that a self-righteous, religious person cannot accept.
Uncalculated generosity is very offensive to a person who has worked so hard to prove their worth and earn their keep.

Uncalculated generosity is very offensive to a person who has worked so hard to prove their worth. This is the offense of grace. That it sets our relationship to the Father and it sets our relationships to one another on completely different footing.
Where it's not about what we have done or what we can do or what we will do. It's about the generosity of the Father's heart for us. And all the appetizers of his grace.
And then the main meal as we get it. And then all the desserts that are to follow. And what offends us so deeply is it offends our sense of justice. And our sense of fairness.
That just seems to be common sense to us when we are living in a lost world. I saw a quote this week about karma. It said, The universe does not carry our debts.
[20:15] It always returns back to you what you give it. And I was thinking about that quote a little bit. Because I was in an Indian restaurant. And I thought, I don't think this is just at the core of Hinduism or Buddhism.

I think this is just commonplace in the Pacific Northwest. Like I was talking with a woman at Pure Bread. Anybody like Pure Bread? If you don't know what Pure Bread is, please look it up after the service.
It is the best croissants you will ever have. It's just amazing. I was once there, supposed to be reading a book. And there was a woman that interrupted me. It was clearly lonely. She wanted to talk. As we were talking, we kind of got to the meaning of life stuff.
And she told me that she believes in reincarnation. And essentially what that means is, it may sound crazy to many of you, but I actually think she was articulating something that a lot of us really believe.
is if I am good in this life, I will be rewarded in the next. If I'm not good in this life, then I will be demoted in the next. And it's just an endless cycle of you get what you deserve, you get what you give, and you pay or receive for what you do.
[21:27] And see, what's interesting about this is that the older son and the younger son are not all that different in the way they approach the father on this one. They both think that their relationship to the father has to be based on service and obedience.

Do you notice, that's why the father cuts off the younger son before he says, I want to be your servant. And that's why the older son says, I've served you all these years.
See, the only difference between the two is really the quality of their service that they offered the father. The younger son offered him nothing. No quality service. And the older son felt he offered him a lot of quality service.
And that he deserved something because of it. See, the biggest stumbling block of Christianity for religious people is that your salvation does not depend on the faithfulness of your service to God, no matter how glorious it is and how long it's been.
Your salvation depends on the ridiculousness of God's heart for you. The madness of his mercy, as David's been saying, he doesn't care where you've been and what you've done.
[22:33] He just wants you as his child and he just wants you home. And so grace turns upside down all the religions of the world. And grace exposes the madness of our lostness.

And the madness of our lostness is simply this, that we keep clinging to a way of relating to God that is based on what we have done, what we can do, or what we will do. When Jesus is saying, I want to turn that whole world upside down.
And how do we know that we've drunk the Kool-Aid of self-righteousness? I think it's actually quite simple. It's not that complicated. It's that word, that nifty little word, right in verse two, grumbling.
Do you have murmuring lips and a grumpy heart? Are you a very serious Christian? Yet it's a serious yet joyless Christianity.

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And this leads us, finally, to the madness of Jesus' love. This is the main thing that all three parables want us to grasp. They want it to, Jesus wants it to grip and nourish and transform our hearts.
[23:43] This is it. The joy and pleasure that God has in loving the lost. Do you see how beautiful that is? I love this about Jesus. I love it so much. He has people that are critiquing him for being generous towards the lost.

And Jesus doubles down. He triples down. He doesn't just say, I associate with the lost. He says, I love the lost and I go to find them. And he doesn't just say, I love the lost and I go to find them. He says, I rejoice when I find them. My joy is in them. I want to be with them. They are the objects of my pleasure and my affection. There is nothing that I want more in life.
And this is part of the madness of his love for us. It's not just how deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond measure. It's the joy of his love and the joy that he has in loving.
He always delights in showing mercy. See, the parable of the lost sheep tips us off to this right at the very beginning in verses three to seven. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one.
[24:46] Now this would have been absurd. What shepherd does that? Risking all 99 to go after one. But what's the main point? The joy. The joy the shepherd has when he finds.

And then he gets all the community together and says, it's time to rejoice. And from heaven's perspective, we're told that repentance is a reason for joy wherever it's found. And then Jesus doubles down again in the parable of the lost coin.
The woman stays up all night looking for it. She couldn't wait till morning. There's this sense of urgency. And when she finds it, gather together the whole community. We're going to rejoice because I found one lost coin.
Has anybody ever called you together because you found a $20 bill on the ground? They found a $20 bill on the ground and wanted to throw a party. You see, the great irony of chapter 15, and this is where we're going to end, is that the religious leaders and the Bible teachers are grumbling on earth while there's gladness in heaven.
They're resentful on earth while there is rejoicing in heaven. They are busy being petty on earth when there is a party in heaven. And the simple question that Jesus just poses to us, he asks each one of us this morning, is will you admit that you are lost?
[25:59] Like one way or another, self-centeredness, self-righteousness, I don't really care. Will you just admit that you are lost and will you join the joy of the prodigal God where the madness of my love is the only thing that matters?

Brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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