

The Prodigal & the Pharisee

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[0 : 00] Please turn to our reading from the Gospel of Luke, page 1054, Luke's Gospel, chapter 15, verse 11.

Now, Jesus speaking, and he said, and there was a man who had two sons. For many people who are looking for answers in life today, the church might not be the first port of call in their search for an answer to life.

And the church can hold its hands up and admit that sometimes we've got it wrong, sometimes we've projected a kind of a cold image to people on the outside.

And the man who might spend a lot of time in the pub, a single mom struggling to bring up our kids by herself, someone who just would not view themselves and would perhaps not be viewed as part of the establishment, might feel that if they're needing an answer to life and they may indeed be perplexed with all the questions, such questions, they would not think of coming to church.

And then, as Christians, we might come along, we might try and share the joy of Jesus with them, the joy that has transformed our own lives. And we say to them, well, you need Jesus as your saviour.

[1 : 48] And we say one thing, but they hear another thing. We say, you need Jesus as your saviour, and they hear religion. They hear rules. They hear rituals. They hear memories and the echoes of a childhood where they were dragged along to church, and it was just enough to put them off for life.

The highlands of Scotland are full of such people. And so you may wonder, well, how do we resolve such a tension? And that seems to be something of the tension that Jesus had here, where you had the religious establishment of the day, the Pharisees, the religious rite of the day, looking down their noses at Jesus precisely because he was spending time with the guys that hung out in the pub. Now, he was spending time with women who had very dubious sexual histories and all the rest of it. And these people that the Pharisees viewed as scum, Jesus actually liked them, and they loved Jesus.

Fascinating, isn't it? The religious people hated Jesus. The non-religious people, they loved the guy. They thought, this is some man.

We like him. We understand what he is about. Perhaps the religious people had a point on.

Perhaps they felt his very mixing with these people lent some kind of credence to their lifestyle.

[3 : 20] And their lifestyle, there's no getting away from it. It was messy. It was complicated. It was sinful. It was not what God would want for them. And so in response to the religious rites attacks upon his way of dealing with people, Jesus tells three stories.

All connected with one theme. Something was lost, and it was found. There was a sheep in the hill. It was lost. Shepherd went out.

He found it. Simple. There's a woman. She lost a coin, perhaps part of a chain used as a decoration, as a necklace. One was lost. Ruined the whole necklace.

She searched until she found it and rejoiced. And then this well-known story of, as you have it termed here, the prodigal son who wanders off.

He gets lost, but also eventually comes back home. Why did Jesus tell this story? Why did he end, out of the three, why did he end with this one?

[4 : 28] What is he driving at in the context of speaking to the religious authorities of the day? What he is saying in this passage, first of all, and very clearly, is that people can be lost without religion.

Playing any factor in their lives. That's a statement of the obvious, but in the story it's pretty clear on that point. That's the first point. Second point, a bit different.

Well, let's focus on that first one. Lost without religion. It's a simple story. Perhaps we can spin it out in terms more familiar to us if we were to put it in a modern setting.

It's a story that still resonates down the centuries. Of a younger son and an older son falling out and a family being divided over inheritance.

Let's imagine, shall we, two brothers. We'll call them Callum and we'll call them Ian. Callum is the younger brother. Ian is the elder brother. And Callum comes up to their old da, their old pa on the croft, and he says, Look, I just want my share of the croft.

[5 : 46] Maybe it's a way out on the west coast of Lewis that this is happening, we'll see. And da agrees. Ian's not very happy. They have to take a big mortgage out so that Callum can clear off to the big city with plenty of money.

And Ian feels that he's left at home in the croft having to work twice as hard to pay off this crushing mortgage from the bank. So Callum goes away, attracted by the big lights of the city, with a whisper of freedom across the minch.

And he heads off down to London to carve out a life of joy and freedom away from the stuffiness of his upbringing. And he thinks life is going to be great, does he not?

And he heads off to the city life. He gets his training. He gets a great job. He's earning 80 grand a year. But in the midst of the nightclubs and the partying and the women and all the rest of it, he quickly develops a cocaine habit.

And the best part of 20 grand a year, perhaps, is going in his cocaine habit. And life, for a while, it's going great. Isn't that the promise for so many?

[7 : 02] And isn't it always the case that folks will flock from small rural areas to the lights of the big cities? Why? Because there, there are no ties.

There, you can get away with things. There, there is no kin and there's no kirk to keep an eye on your behavior. And therefore, the promise of a freedom is irresistible.

And if you go to the cities, you will find many people with a religious upbringing, a good, solid upbringing, who have rejected, turned away from that, and don't want to know anymore.

All because of the sweet promise of freedom. And they're longing for that freedom. They didn't find it at home in the craft. They didn't find it in the religious upbringing.

Didn't find it getting dragged along to church every Sabbath. So they're off. No ties. Do what they like. That's what Calum was doing. Calum's happy. But then before you know it, problems begin to come along.

[8 : 06] And all this time, Ian is back working hard in the craft, slogging his guts out to keep things going. So this is the kind of story of someone who is lost without religion.

Lost without any desire to have a moral compass guiding their lives or anything like that. Trying to find freedom without any sense of accountability in life.

It's a sweet lie that many buy into today. How many people treat God just like this?

You see, for Calum to go to his father and ask, Look, Margaret's the Croft so I can get my proportion. It would be shocking. In the story that Jesus told to the Pharisees, there would have been a sharp intake of breath at that detail.

With a younger son going to a father, the head of the family. And out in the Middle East, father, big man, still are in that part of the world.

[9 : 13] And the Pharisees, the listeners to Jesus, they would have been horrified at that detail. It's that detail that really would have got them wound up in a righteous anger against this younger brother.

How could he do that? Because when he was asking the father for his inheritance, he was effectively asking or saying, I wish you were dead.

When do you get an inheritance? When somebody pops their clogs, they're dead. He was hoping. He was like saying, I wish you were out of my life. I wish you were dead. And that's what they heard.

So it was a real horror story for the people of Jesus' day. And it's not so hard to see. It would be pretty heartbreaking if it's happened to anybody here. But we do treat God like that, do we not? We're quite happy to take God's gifts. But we don't want the giver. We're quite happy to take his gift of life, love, the ability to love, joy. All of these things come from our creator.

[10 : 20] We'll take them. But in our desire for freedom, we run from him with as many of his gifts as we can keep hold off. And so we run and we try and live a life without religion, without faith,

without any of that stuff.

But this is a story about a son who was found. So what happens when God gets on your case?

What happens when God begins to chase you down?

What will it be like? Well, according to Jesus here, one of the peculiar things is that the famines in life can be good.

When God is on your case, the very famines, the very harsh experiences, the rock bottom moments of life become blessings. When God is on your case.

That's what happened in this story. It wouldn't be hard to spin that tale for our column down in London. When he's developing his cocaine habit, can't keep his head straight.

[11:32] Getting stoned every weekend. No, not every weekend. Every day can't function without his fix. Before you know it, he loses his job. He's in the gutter. His friends desert him when his money disappears.

And he's in a mess. It's like an eternal story, isn't it? Of humanity. Repeated probably by some here tonight.

This is your story. A story known to many of you here. Maybe of your own children. But what happens when you hit rock bottom?

A famine came. That's what it says there. Verse 14. Arose in the country. Hired himself out. He had a plan. Didn't go back home then.

Hired himself out. Didn't work. Things just got worse and worse before he was in the mud and the mire of a pig farm.

[12:33] Again, in the listeners of Jesus' day, the Pharisees, whoa, they'd have been just shaking their heads at that point. Whoa, whoa. Terrible. You know, for Jewish listeners, this was the point of degradation.

This was disgusting. Jews did not mix with pigs. They didn't feed them. They didn't clean them.

They didn't deal with them. And the thought of eating the food of pigs would make you sick.

This was Jesus painting graphically. With these strong colors across the easel. The picture here, he was showing graphically. A sheer degradation of where this man's desire for freedom brought him.

His desire for freedom enchained him. His desire for freedom enslaved him. You see, every time we run from God, every time we try and get away from him, clinging on to his gifts, with this dream, this aspect of freedom out there, you become a slave.

A slave to a thousand and one different idols of the heart. It could be popularity. It could be sex. It could be power. It could be money. It could be career. It could be any number of these things.

[13:52] And we worship them until they fail us. They always, always will do. And here's degradation. Hitting rock bottom.

Some of you here tonight will know exactly what this is like. You have known these moments of profound degradation in your soul. In your actual life.

Some of you, it's in your thought life. It's maybe not gone much in an expression physically in your life. But you're appalled sometimes, are you? With what you are capable of thinking about, are you?

It's human nature. It's dark. It's not a pretty thing. But some of you here tonight, you've actually been here. You've probably been in rock bottom. You've probably been in the filth and the degradation.

And even to be here tonight in church. You know, it probably broke you to cross the door. The shame of your life. The thought, what are these people going to think about me being here tonight?

[15:02] Well, I praise God if there's anybody here like that tonight. And let me say in the name of Jesus, you are welcome here tonight. Because he wants you here. He loves you even though you hate yourself.

He has brought you here because he wants to change you. And he can change you. And you see, it was only when this man, in Jesus' story, hit rock bottom that he began to go up.

And everybody's rock bottom might be different. Some people, it's when a relationship breaks down or they lose a job. Other people, they're out of their heads and drink their drugs and they're literally living in the gutter.

A whole new level of degradation. But different stages where you just look at your life and you say, something's got to change.

When, to a degree, you come to your senses, as this man did, and you say, something's got to change. Are you at that stage tonight? Is that what has brought you here?

[16 : 05] And if in our story of Callum down in London, this is the moment when he picks himself up. He somehow finds some money.

Hitches a lift up north. In the prawn lorry or something. Gets up to the terminal in Alapul. And he manages to get a ticket back to the island. Back home. Hadn't been a famine, there'd be no ferry. See, sometimes a famine is a great thing in life.

Sometimes to be shaken in your own personal experiences is the very thing that will awaken you to your real need and to the real place of freedom.

So, when God is on your case, he will send these famines. He will shake you. And sometimes God's love is so ruthless, he will shake you to the point of breaking you. You just wish it will end.

[17 : 12] You'll pray it will end. It will terrify you how low you can go. But it's a love that shakes you. It's a father's love that will shake you. Till you're almost broken.

And you seek him. And you begin to look for answers. And you even come to church. And star in a way. On a night like tonight. Looking in your heart. Longing for something.

Because God is on your case. My friends, God is on your case tonight. If that's your story. And when he does that, the famine can be good. And also, when he's on your case, love will meet you. We'll meet you at the pier. Let's go back to Calum as he heads across the minch and the ferry. And every week he's been away.

His old da has been around town. Always manages to buy a Stornoway Gazette. There is P&J; down near the pier somewhere. Always just happens to be there when the ferry calls in.

[18 : 18] Always a wistful look at those who are disembarking. Waiting. And everybody around knows why. All the locals see him there.

With his old sea cap on. And his pipe in his mouth. And they know why he's there. And they whisper. And sometimes they laugh. And they say, well, what an old fool.

Does he really think that Calum's coming home? You see, he waits. He's out there.

Not worried about the shame, as it were. Standing amongst the creels on the pier. One day, he sees Calum. And he goes to him.

And he needs to do that. And that's why when Jesus told this story, he makes this point. It's the father who sees him from afar, recognizes him, and comes to him, seeking him out.

[19 : 23] Because if the father didn't come to him, he would never get across the threshold. Home. The older brother would have heard about him. Sent him packing.

In our story, Ian would have heard him and bought him a single ticket back to the mainland. We don't want to see your face around here. In the days of Jesus, in the Middle East, apparently there was even a ceremony.

I think it was a pot of burnt acorns or something like that, that they would smash at the feet of such a prodigal to say that we renounce you, we do not want you. Maybe even in some cases they could have been stoned, they could have been killed.

Anathema to the community at large for their behavior. But what does our God do? He goes, and he seeks, and he draws, and he opens the way, he permits the return of the prodigal which otherwise would never happen.

And do you know, there's like a great humility in God that so many times when people will seek God, it's only when they've tried everything, when they've exhausted every other possibility, and that eventually they will come to God and say, well, okay, I've tried it all, it hasn't worked, I'll try God.

[20 : 43] You know, it doesn't say much, does it, for what you think about God? And yet, here's the humility of God. He would, as it were, allow himself to be used, as it were, like that, if that's the right way to say it.

that he's the brick glass in case of emergency, the last option. Such is the love of God the Father as revealed through Jesus, that that is the love that is here tonight.

That is the love that is calling someone here tonight. You come, and that's the love that will meet you. And that is the love that will permit your whole life to change.

That is the love that will not reject you if you seek him, but he's already seeking you. And the only reason you're here, and the only reason you're seeking God is because he's already on your case, and he's already been seeking you.

So be encouraged. Come. Love will meet you at the pier. And love will lead you to repentance. This young son, he comes in verse 18 with a great plan.

[22 : 01] He says, well, I've sinned, I'll confess it, and then I'll give him my option. Make me a hired servant. Confession and plan.

And when he finally meets the father, down in verse 21, the only bit that gets out of his mouth is the confession. And that's appropriate. Because he's been a real piece of scum.

He's lived a filthy life. He has treated his father in a heaviest and horrendous way. He's brought such shame upon his family. And he confesses the sin.

And boy, he had plenty to confess. But at that point, the father breaks in. The plan never comes out. This idea, let me become a hired servant, it doesn't get out of his mouth. Cut off. That's what God does. The only thing you can bring to God tonight is your need.

[23 : 05] Your sin. The only thing you can bring him tonight. Your plans, don't be foolish to think, look, maybe I could change my life and maybe God could have something to do with that.

If I try a little bit harder, if I try and clean up my act, then I'll go to church, then I could commit my ways to God a little bit more. You know, this younger son is like he's trying.

He's saying, I'll become like my older brother. Don't like him, can't stand him, but I'll do it if I have to just to get food in my belly. See, with his plan, there's no real love at this stage.

For the father, there's just a desire to do something to alleviate his own mess. But you see, the real love of God here leads us to repentance.

So the love of God is not caused by our repentance. It's not caused by our sense of sorrow or shame over being prodigals.

[24 : 18] The love of God is not caused by our repentance. Our real repentance is caused by the love of God. When you are finally confronted personally with the depth of God's love for you and the full knowledge of all your filth and misery and degradation and sin and you see that this father would love you, this father would come out to you and appear, that this father would welcome you home, that this father would do anything to bring you home.

When you see that kind of love, that's what will break your heart, that's what will lead you to real repentance, real contrition, real sorrow. will you chuck away your plans there?

Do you see that love? Pray that you will by the end of this message. Just as you think we're drawing to the end, just as you think Jesus has made his point, this overwhelming love of the father that would bring the prodigal home, you've only just come to the introduction.

Don't worry, I don't plan to keep you too much longer. But this is the point, you see, where he's got the Pharisees. They're nodding in agreement up to this point to say, oh, that boy, he's bad, he's scum, he's just off the rails.

He deserves to be hammered. And then the father forgives him, and then the older brother comes into the story. Verse 25.

[26 : 13] Here Jesus is now with this whole story of the prodigal, he has simply baited his trap. And he now goes for the real jugular. Remember, three stories of things that were lost in the context of his discussions with the Pharisees, he's now going straight for them.

And remember, in each of these three stories, something was lost, but someone had to go out and find it. And now we hear in this story, verse 20, 28, that once again the father has to go out to a son. So what is Jesus saying here? He's saying that the elder brother, the one who represents the Pharisees, the religious people of the establishment of the day, that he was just as lost as the first son.

And now the Pharisees are beginning to try the cage. Hang on a minute. He's just put us into the story. He's just saying that we're lost, that this father has to go out to us as well.

Yes. And so the elder son hears the music, the dancing, as of course he always is, out in the fields, working diligently, slaving his guts off on the cross as it were.

[27 : 40] And he will not come in. And again for the Pharisees to hear of the head of a family household in a Middle Eastern setting going out to one of his sons who refused to come in, that was shocking.

That was appalling behavior on the part of the son. You didn't treat the head of a household like that. And so Jesus drives home his point here now.

That you can be lost without religion, but you can equally be lost with religion. You can be lost with religion.

You can be so moral, so clean living, so hard working, so diligent, so obedient, so respectful on the outside. This elder brother, he had all of these virtues and they were like an outer covering, an

outward cloak of virtue and religiosity, of respectability.

reality. And when you can have all of that going in your life, you can look down your nose at the prodigals around you and star away. You can feel a sense of pride as you compare in your inner being them to yourself.

[29 : 02] And Jesus is saying to you tonight, my friend, don't you see you are just as lost with your religion? religion here as the thing that would use these things to earn favor with God, to buy your way into heaven.

But work hard, keep the Sabbath, come to church, do all these good things, but with a wrong motive, is effectively using religion as your savior, rather than trusting on the savior that God has provided.

A life like that has no real spiritual joy, and no assurance of real righteousness and acceptance in the eyes of God. Is that an area of possible danger for any of you here tonight?

You know, maybe for some of you older people, and even as Christians, we could be prodigals, we've come to faith, but we could slip into the elder brother mentality of using the very blessings that God gives us, like Bible study, prayer, church, Sabbath, all of these things that are there to strengthen us, they're there for our sanctification, but we end up turning them into our justification. This mentality is infectious, and you see, you can be lost without religion, complete libertarian, anything goes, pleasure seeker, but you can be the other kind of person, clean living, and mortal, and all the rest of it, and still absolutely lost.

[30 : 43] That's what Jesus is saying here. How can that be the case? Well, this is where he runs at home, verse 29, where the older brother answers, he answers the father who's come out to him, remember, and the older brother is seizing, and he says, look, these many years I have served you, I have slaves for you, and I never disobeyed your command, and you never gave me anything.

He saw his entire service to his father as slavery. He was simply trying to buy his father off in some way.

He was trying to control his father, and from that position he could control his father and condemn his younger brother. You see, if we just have outward virtues without a real inner motive that's pure, then our outward virtues become vices.

Let me try and make that plain and clear. You can be so outwardly clean-looking, moral, outward, good neighbor, religious to the eyeballs, all the rest of it, really respectable looking.

You've got no joy, no assurance, because really you're just using all of your religion to try and control God. You want something from God, but you do not want God.

[32 : 22] You're trying to manipulate God. You're trying to use God. You're trying to bribe God. You're trying to pawn him off with your outward behavior while self-controlling and being in control of your life.

It is the desire that wants from God, who take his blessings, as this son would have wanted the farm and all that was on it, but did not want God himself.

Did not want the banquet. Did not want the joy. Did not want that. When we live a life like that, when we're so morally respectable, on that way, and I'm not knocking living that way, I'm just questioning the inner motive.

That's what Jesus is doing here. Then what you're really doing, if you're living like that, without Christ as your savior, you're trying to use religion as your savior. You're trying to manipulate God, and you really don't actually want God for who he is in and of himself.

Maybe use him for an emergency. You maybe ply on the religious duty when you think about eternity, but you don't want God himself.

[33 : 38] That attitude Jesus is saying will condemn you. You'll be lost with it. You'll be doomed with it. Because what will happen when you get into eternity? What will happen when everything is pulled back and you see the reality of God?

You will say, I don't want him. I never wanted him. I just wanted his things. I wanted his stuff. If anything, our pride, we want to be God, but we don't want God.

And so you will not want heaven because you will discover in that moment that heaven is only about God. It's about glorying in him.

It's about rejoicing in him. And if you never wanted him really in hell is a place where the door is locked on the inside because you will not want heaven because it's all about God.

And so you will choose hell. You will walk into that place as far as you can from God and it's effectively locking the door from the inside because you just don't want God because you just haven't got God.

[34 : 55] You haven't seen God's heart. You don't understand the Father's heart. You don't get his love. You don't get grace. You don't understand.

And so Jesus is saying through all of this there are two ways to be lost and that the way we title this parable isn't really the full story the prodigal son.

It's the parable of the two lost sons. Even though one was so close that he had all that the father had as it were around him, it's that category of person that would say, Lord, Lord, did we not do this for you?

And Jesus will turn around and say, but I never knew you. You can be that close. See, both sons didn't really understand the father's love.

God's heart. So where do you get a vision of God tonight? Where can you discover God's heart? Where can you really see what God is like?

[36 : 05] Not your own idea, not some mixed up idea from some church background that just left you turned off to religion, and not some morally outward lifestyle, while inside you really don't want God himself?

Where do you just see that the real father heart of God, the real love of God? Only one place. Only one place will change you.

Only one place you really, really see that love. And you need to introduce into the story of the two lost sons, you need to introduce a third son. You need to introduce the real elder brother that we have, who so unlike this elder brother who did not want to throw a party, who did not want to kill the fatted calf, who wanted to keep the wealth of that for himself and his own inheritance, who would not give a robe or a ring or sandals.

We have an elder brother tonight in Jesus, who reveals the father's love for us in the most incredible way that the elder son that we worship tonight, who can change your life, whether you are a prodigal or whether you are a Pharisee, whether you've got religion up to your eyeballs or whether you're completely a religious, this elder son is the one who is willing to pay the price for our sin because all sin has a cost, a terrible cost.

God's and our elder brother, he gave up his robe and his ring, he gave up heaven and all its wonder and all its glory in order for us to find him, in order for us to have the robe and the ring of adoption have been brought into God's family.

[38 : 06] So where will you really understand God? Where will you see God tonight? And where in that vision of the Father's love, will you be changed? Will your heart be melted?

Will you be transformed? It's when you gaze at the cost, it's when you gaze at the cross, where God gave his only son up onto that cross at Calvary to bleed and to die for the religious and the irreligious, for the prodigal and for the Pharisee, that Christ here was appealing to both, appealing to those who are searching for freedom out there and appealing to those who think they can buy God off when they have no real interest in him.

Tonight, there are people here in both categories. Some of you are more like the prodigal and some of you are more like the Pharisee.

you've been coming so faithfully to church for years and you're maybe very close to passing from the scene of time.

Some of you will be away before we see the next new year and you still just don't feel that you've got it.

[39 : 31] In your heart, you're just still afraid of death. You've got no real assurance. Do you know where you're going to get that assurance tonight? Not by your own merit, not by looking at yourself, not by your own religion, but by looking at how much God has loved us in the cross of his son.

Gaze into the eyes of Jesus tonight. Apprehend that this man went through hell on that cross so that you and I need never go to that place.

So the father left the feast to find his elder son who wouldn't come in. God the father, son and spirit were with us this morning as we sat at the banquet of his love.

But he's here tonight who are coming out of that feast to speak to some of you. And he's saying to you, you might not get it but I love you.

And I want you. And that's why you are here. And if you doubt my love, then gaze upon my heart on the cross. Gaze upon the price I would willingly pay for the redemption, the purchase of any one of you.

[40 : 59] Drop your religion and embrace Jesus. stop your pursuit and your worship of pleasure and your desire for freedom by worshipping pleasure which is only an echo.

And embrace the reality if you're a prodigal. And come and find the reality of all that our souls are longing and searching for. How does this all end?

Well, Callum comes across the mince. His father meets him on the ferry terminal. Meets him on the pier, takes him home. He starts coming out to Stornow Free Church.

He starts going out to the prayer meeting. Before you know it, he's professing his faith. I've been redeemed, I've been changed. Jesus has loved me and died for me. And he sits at the table, the banquet of God's love.

And that's where Jesus leaves it. You see, how fitting it was to be glad because this your brother was dead is a lie. He was lost, but he's found. But Jesus leaves it there.

[42 : 07] He doesn't go on at the very end of verse 32. He doesn't give us a verse 33. He doesn't tell us about the elder brother. He doesn't tell us about the religious one, the Pharisees he's speaking to.

He doesn't tell us about Ian in our story. Did Ian ever get to the table? Callum got there before him. It's the kind of thing that would bug the Ians of this world. Grace. Will there be a verse 33 in your life?

Drop your religion. Embrace Jesus. If you can't do that, gaze again into the Father's heart of love until you fall before him and you worship him.

And all your doubts evaporate in that blinding vision, the depth of God's love for you. Jesus is here right now.

And he wants you, even you. So come and call out to him and ask him in. Amen.

[43 : 16] Let's pray. Amen. Father in heaven, we ask for those who are here tonight who are prodigals, who are horrified at their own degradation and sin, and who could almost despair at the thought of anybody loving them.

Jesus, show them your love tonight and set them free. Give them the freedom that they've always longed for. given the pleasures and joys at your right hand that they've sought in wrong things that have only destroyed and taken and not given.

Jesus, give them pleasures forevermore at your right hand. Set them free tonight in your love and your power. Hear us and may the power of the Holy Spirit set people free tonight. And Lord Jesus, we pray.

We pray for those who are religious. We pray for the good, clean, living people. We pray for those who have been coming to church for years. We pray for those who would never do these awful things, who would never want to bring shame or hurt that way, but in whose hearts they are not truly yours yet.

They only love what you could give them, but they do not yet love you. Oh, Jesus, come and show them. Show them who you really are.

[44 : 38] Show them who God really is that we cannot buy God off with the crumbs of our pathetic rags of righteousness. But let us come and be clothed and dressed through you.

Lord, I pray especially tonight for any older people here who are close to eternity and still haven't found that peace with God.

Jesus, reveal yourself now in this moment. May all doubts about God's love fly from their souls and may all hope in their own righteousness evaporate like the morning mist and may they fall before you now as our hearts have been revealed tonight through your word of truth.

Wherever we are in the spectrum between the prodigal and the Pharisee, Lord, redeem us and show us the third way through the great and the true elder brother, Jesus.

Hear us, we pray. Amen.