

The Tale Of Two Wayward Sons

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[0:00] All right, if you have your sermon notes, I want to give you a fair warning. We're not going to get all the way through that today. This Luke chapter 15 is a very well-known passage of scripture.

It contains in it the parable of the prodigal son. Although what we're going to hear today and next week might be a little different from what you may have heard before.

So I ask that you approach the subject matter today with an open mind and willing to hear what I think God wants us to hear from this.

We're going to tackle it in one sermon, but it's going to take us two parts. So part one is today, part one is next week. But it really needs to be one message because the whole chapter is this one main message.

But before we dig into that, I want to start with a tale of two families. One Christian family, one not so much. The Wallabies, the Christian family, they lived in a neighborhood and they lived next to another family, the Wombats, the non-Christian family.

[1:17] And the Wallabies were great. They kept up their home. They kept up their lawn. It looked nice. They never used tobacco or alcohol or never used drugs at all.

They didn't curse at all. They didn't fight loudly so that their kids would hear it or neighbors would hear it. Their kids never got in trouble with the law or really in any way.

And they went to church every Sunday. Now, the Wombats were a little bit different. Their house was kind of in need of some help.

Their lawn was not well cared for. They smoked. They drank. And they liked to use weed to mellow out. They cussed often.

They fought loudly. Their kids were often in trouble, often with the law as well. And they never went to church. One day, the Wallabies' daughter came home from school and said to her father, hey, I just heard from one of my friends at school that the Wombats are getting a divorce.

[2:33] And her dad, who was encompassed in a project out in the garage, didn't seem real interested at first. And he just was like, huh? And looked up and just basically said, divorce, huh?

Oh, that's too bad. And then just went right back to his project. She walked in the house and told her mother that the Wombats were about to get a divorce, is what she had heard.

And the mother basically said, oh, well, that's what they get for never going to church. Let that be a lesson to you, sweetie.

If you never go to church, something like this might happen to you. And then she gruffed and she said, well, I hope when the Wombats move out, at least maybe the next new neighbors will be decent.

Sure enough, the ending of the story, the Wombats got divorced and moved away. And the new neighbors came in.

[3:33] They took care of their lawn. They kept a clean house. They never fought out loud or cursed or kids didn't get in trouble. And they went to church.

And that was the end. They lived happily ever after. Now, I hope that you're not identifying with either one of those groups there.

But that story kind of encapsulates what happens here in Luke chapter 15. I want you to notice how Luke 14, what we looked at last week, when Jesus talked about counting the cost, how he ended it, the very last sentence that he says at the end of chapter 14.

It says, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. And look who it is who is coming to Jesus and leaning in and listening.

All the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. Hmm. Interesting.

[4:47] And then the next verse, verse 2, says this. The Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling. They didn't like this.

And they said, this man receives sinners and eats with them. And so before we really get into these, there's three parables in this passage.

And oftentimes they're told as if they're basically one right after the other. And what we're going to learn today is that the first two parables are actually set in contrast to the third, to the story about the prodigal son.

And these are parables. This is Jesus teaching to address this particular charge or this particular question.

And we're going to view it from the way of asking these tough questions. And oftentimes as people are reading through this passage, the tough question it seems as if we're answering is this one.

[5:54] Why would Jesus hang around with, welcome, and dine with sinners? It's a good question. But we're going to see very obviously the heart of Jesus here.

We've seen it before. And this is really not the purpose of the parables, though, is not to answer this particular question. I'm going to pose what I think is the better question as we make our way through these parables, and that's this.

If the Pharisees found no joy at all in the repentance of sinners, and they didn't. They weren't interested in the repentance of sinners.

So what was it that gave them joy? That's the question. What did they take joy in? What did they find in life that brought them joy or made them rejoice?

What was it that they were looking for? We know from other portions of the Gospels that the Pharisees, they loved their places of honor. They wanted people to look up to them.

[7:09] We know about the Pharisees and the scribes that they liked to restrict who could be saved. They wanted the number to be small because in their minds it included them.

They were the best of the best. And so certainly the Gentiles wouldn't make it. And in their minds, many of these Jews wouldn't make it either because they didn't measure up like the Pharisees did, at least in their minds.

The Pharisees, we know from the Gospels, they focused on the technicalities of the law. We saw that multiple times throughout Luke in the way that they viewed the Sabbath laws.

They were very strict when it came to the technicalities. And also, they were very good at protecting their hypocrisy by focusing on the externals, things that people could see, and not what was happening on the inside, in a person's heart, or even in their own heart.

So remember, as we make our way through these parables then, this last phrase, this man receives sinners and eats with them, and they're grumbling about this.

[8:35] They're upset with that. And it's in view of that statement, I believe that question, what is it that does make them rejoice, that Jesus then tells these parables, the first two and then the third.

So these stories then, and you have this on your notes, these brief stories, the first two, exposed the misplaced compassion of the Pharisees.

Because make no mistake, the Pharisees did demonstrate compassion. They did have compassion. The question is, what was it that they were passionate or compassionate about or toward?

That's the question that we want to answer, and that's the question I believe that Jesus answers in these first two parables. So let's take a look at these first two parables, beginning in verse 4.

Jesus says, what man of you, or who among you? And this is the beginning of these parables, starts with the Pharisees looking at themselves, not comparing this to God, but who among you?

[9:57] You're going to relate to each other when you hear these parables. It's going to make sense to you among yourselves when you hear this. What man of you, or who among you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after

the one that is lost until he finds it?

The Pharisees, who we know in other portions of the Gospels, we're going to see this in Luke chapter 16, the very next chapter, they were lovers of money. That's going to be evident here in these two parables.

And when he has found it, so the man has a hundred sheep, and he's going to leave the ninety-nine sheep exposed to the elements, exposed to other predators, in search of the one that was lost. And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. He's rejoicing because he's found his lost sheep.

Now, oftentimes, when we hear this comparison to sheep, we think of, oh, well, we're the sheep in this story. Don't think of it in those terms. Jesus doesn't make that comparison here.

[11:13] He's just talking about dollars and cents here. He's talking about money, what they would find valuable. Okay? So this one lost sheep has been found.

This is what they're rejoicing over. They've lost something. Now they've found it. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

This is kind of an over-the-top thing. I don't know if you had ninety-nine sheep, if you lost one and then found it, are you going to call up all your neighbors and invite them over for a celebratory party or barbecue or what?

I mean, if you invite them over for a meal, what are you cooking? The lost sheep that you just... Or more, depending on how many friends you might have.

Just so, I tell you, now here's the comparison. I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

[12:23] Now, a couple things about this. Number one, what Jesus is saying, you guys are excited about, passionate about a lost sheep. Let me tell you what the Lord gets excited about.

He gets excited about people. He gets excited about the one who repents and comes to Christ. That's what the Lord cares about.

Then the second part of the statement, make no mistake, Jesus is not saying that these Pharisees are among those who don't have to repent. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying, oh, you Pharisees, you don't have to repent.

No, he's saying the opposite of that. He wants them to recognize their need for repentance. And it's when we get to the parable of what we think of as the prodigal son, that's where that's going to become very evident, where he's going to show them just how much they need to repent.

That's the first parable. The second one is very similar to it. This one is about a woman. What woman among you, and then the women in the crowd would be able to relate to this story, having 10 silver coins.

[13:38] If she loses one, pause there for a moment. It's been told that in this culture, women, when they were married as part of their bridal outfit, they would have some sort of headdress on that would have these 10 coins that were woven into or made a ring around this headdress as a part of her wedding gift, as a part of her wedding celebration.

And so these coins would be very precious then to the woman, not just for the value of the coin, but for the sentimentality of it. That's possibly what's in view here.

We don't know that. It's not stated, but that's kind of what's having in mind here. Having 10 silver coins, and if she loses the one coin, does she not then light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

Well, of course. And all the Pharisees in the crowd and the scribes would have listened to this and say, well, obviously, this is how you do it.

This is not unreasonable in any way. And when she has found it, again, she calls together her friends and neighbors saying, rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.

[15:02] This is not sending out a group text. Okay? She's actually having to go to her neighbor's houses and announce that, yes, I did lose this coin, and oh, I found it.

Rejoice with me. So there's some effort involved here. There is some expectation involved in this rejoicing. And again, Jesus says, just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over just the one sinner who repents.

And again, we have this comparison. You Pharisees are getting excited over these things. Notice that the Lord is getting excited and is passionate about something a little bit more worthwhile. Now, I want you to notice what makes these first two parables unique, particularly in comparison to the story that we know as the prodigal son.

Okay? These are unique and different about these first two parables. Notice this. Okay? It's not that these three parables are all telling different version of the same story.

[16:20] The first two parables are signifying something else. Look at this. Notice in the first two parables, the sinfulness, sinfulness at all is not stressed.

It's not in view. It's not even brought up because a sheep doesn't respond in sin, right? Neither does a lost coin.

And so the aspect of sinfulness, which is such a big part of the story of the prodigal son, is such a huge element in that story. And in the first two parables, it's not there at all in the way that they get lost.

Or go astray. In the story of the lost sheep and the lost coin, it's the owner of those items who takes the initiative to go find them.

That's again not what you see in the story of the prodigal son. The owner doesn't do that at all. He may show some longing for his son to return, but he's not going and looking for him.

[17:33] So that's unique. That's different. The owner is willing to seek diligently, persistently. He's going to search high and low to find his lost item, his lost thing, his lost coin, his lost sheep.

And then again, the owner rejoices and invites his neighbors to do so likewise and expects them to rejoice with him. So that's a part of it as well.

It's not just that the owner is rejoicing, but he's inviting his neighbors. And it's a little over the top, wouldn't you think? The idea of what he's doing here with calling his neighbors and expecting them to rejoice too.

In both stories, the rejoicing is compared to the rejoicing of heaven at the salvation of one sinner. So again, Jesus is setting this scene of you guys are rejoicing over these things and here's what heaven rejoices over.

Here's how heaven rejoices. And again, in the first two, it is not men who are lost. Men or women who are lost. It is things, possessions that are lost.

[18:58] And it is man, in this case a man and a woman, but it is man, generally speaking, that seeks diligently to find what is lost.

And so that's what makes these first two parables unique. And so now you have this on your notes. These two parables were not primarily intended as a picture of God seeking after lost men.

No, he is looking at the Pharisees and responding to their grumbling about why is it that you invite these lost sinners and tax collectors to come and hang out with you and dine with you.

Why would you do that? No. These two stories two stories are of men seeking after lost things, lost possessions.

Because the Pharisees, they loved things, they loved their possessions, they loved money. Jesus loves people.

[20:18] And they were grumbling. So when it comes to the story of the prodigal son, actually, it's probably better to refer to it in this way.

It's a story of a rebellious son, a rebellious but repentant son. And even more so, it's a story about a self-righteous, unrepentant son.

If you had to pick the one main character, there are three main characters in the story of the prodigal son. There's the prodigal, the younger son who asks for his inheritance and goes away. The father who waits patiently for his son to return. And then, the story concludes with the older brother, the older son.

And I think that that is the main focus of what Jesus is doing in telling this story because he's addressing the Pharisees and the scribes and the grumbling that they have toward these sinners and tax collectors who are coming and gathering around Jesus.

[21:33] And it just frosts them. They don't like that about Jesus. That for them is an obstacle. They've seen the miracles.

They've seen, you know, the incredible things that Jesus has done. They recognize his claim as Messiah, but they can't get over this hurdle, one of a number of hurdles that they have with Jesus. And perhaps even the biggest one is this, that these sinners and tax collectors, they like to gather around Jesus. And even though Jesus and the Pharisees, get this, Jesus and the Pharisees, their doctrine is probably the same in terms of what they believe.

But now the Pharisees, they're self-righteous, they're full of pride and self-righteousness and selfishness and hypocrisy.

They don't see it. And so when they see Jesus, they see someone who is a threat and they see someone who is, how could he hang around with these despicable people?

[22:45] We have spent our lives trying to stay separate from these terrible people. Why would he cozy up to them? At least it seems as if that's what he's doing.

And so again, remember, he's answering this charge from verse two. These scribes and these Pharisees, they're grumbling and saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

And so there are three main characters in this story. And let's take a look at them. What I'm going to do right now is just read through the text.

And then as we get to the end of that text, we're going to be done for today. And then when we come back next week, we'll do a quick review and then we'll get into these characters and talk about why Jesus is focused on this older brother, this older son, and what the message is for us. So let's take a look at this story. So Jesus said, verse 11, there was a man who had two sons. So we have a father and two sons. Those are the three main characters of our story.

[23:58] And the younger of them said to the father, I just lost everything. Here it goes. Technology. The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me.

Pause for a moment. What father in his right mind would do this? By the way, think of yourselves as being in the crowd listening to this story and right off the bat, are you not thinking, well, Jesus, aren't you going a little bit over the top about the celebrations with the coins and the sheep?

And Jesus, when you get to the prodigal son here, okay, yeah, there's been a lot of rebellious sons who might do something audacious like this, but I've never met a dad. I've never met a father who would say, oh, you want me to die?

You want me to pretend I'm dead and just give you your inheritance now? No, that's not going to happen. And part of Jesus' parables, he would go to extremes in order to teach his point.

And so this dad is going to comply with the request of his younger son and he divides his property between them. So he's got the two sons and he's going to divide the property between the two sons.

[25:20] Now the older son gets a double portion of his inheritance of the property then. And so basically the younger son then gets a third of the property.

The father basically gives him the cash value of a third of the property and gives it to his younger son. Here you go. Go have a blast.

Again, very outlandish. But again, this extreme nature of the story is a part of what Jesus uses to get his point across.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and he took a journey into a far country. Read here, Gentile country. At least the Pharisees would view it.

Actually, everyone in his audience would have viewed it that way. And there he squandered his property in reckless living. This reckless living is where we eventually end up with the word prodigal.

[26:23] Prodigal means wasteful or reckless living. And so this is what he has done. And he eventually spends it all.

It doesn't take him long to do this. And a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. So you can imagine and you may have heard stories about how he had a whole bunch of friends because he's got money to spend and then once the money runs out, the friends run out and so he's got nothing and nowhere to go and so he's in trouble.

And he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. Now again, every little detail of this story, think of it as a prod to the Pharisees because not only he's just not feeding regular animals, he's feeding unclean animals.

Animals that the Jewish people weren't allowed to touch. So he's out in the field now and this is Jesus kind of poking his fingers in their eyes and see this, I mean this is how bad this kid is. He is that bad. He's going to do everything, every choice, every decision that he's making is an affront to these Pharisees.

[27:53] and he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything. I mean this guy is as low as it goes.

Okay? So he's hit rock bottom and there he finally comes to himself and he says to himself how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread but I perish here with hunger. And he recognizes that he's he comes to his senses if you will and he recognizes the way that my father treats his servants is much better than the condition that I find myself in right now. And so rather than die of hunger rather than just be in this terrible predicament I'm going to humble myself I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him father and I want you to notice this prepared speech.

I will say to him father I have sinned against heaven and before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son treat me as one of your hired servants.

[29:00] So he just wants to go back home and to get hired as a servant at his father's home where he knows he will be treated decently and have everything that he needs.

He arose and he came to his father. Now again notice the father is not out searching for him. The father is not looking not sweeping any ground not looking under the beds he's not going into other towns he's not doing anything that the previous two parables the owner was doing.

He's at home. Now even though he's at home he still is longing for his son to return. while he was still a long way off his father saw him so his father's looking he's looking off to the distance he's I see someone coming up the road could this be my son and as he looks off in the distance he can see the height the stature the gait of his son's walk and he can recognize finally yes my younger son is coming home and he felt compassion okay not for things not for a coin not for a lost sheep but he felt compassion for his son and he ran and he embraced him and he kissed him and again the Pharisees are like no sir no sir not any reasonable father that they knew would do this no the father would wait back at the home with his arms crossed and when his son finally got there and his son came in and groveled he would say well now you got to prove it and he wouldn't hug him and he certainly wouldn't kiss him playing with the pigs he wouldn't he wouldn't do any of that and maybe maybe he would accept his son back as a servant maybe on a trial basis and probably not as a full-on son but just as a hired hand and let's see how you do let's test it out see what happens but no not this not this father this father is crazy this father this father runs out to accept him to embrace him to kiss him the son said to him father I have sinned against heaven and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son stop dad interrupts the speech son isn't even able to get the speech out dad just interrupts him and says to his servants stop bring quickly the best robe put it on him best robe put a ring on his hand you know what the ring means the ring is you're back in the family the family ring you're you're you're you're already family shoes on his feet bring the fattened calf and kill it let us eat and celebrate again completely unrealistic especially from the viewpoint of the

Pharisees no way would a righteous and holy God do this this doesn't make sense for this my son was dead he said he was alive again he was lost and is found and began to celebrate now can you can you figure out why the tax collectors and the sinners like to hang around Jesus can you can you figure out why Jesus was they were so attracted to Jesus they wanted to hear more of what Jesus was teaching because of this they had been used to hearing what the scribes and the Pharisees taught they were the religious leaders they were the ones in charge and so their teaching would be oh you need to repent repent repent and if you're lucky they probably wouldn't use that word you might get back into God's good graces if you do all the things if you cross all your T's and dot all your I's the way that we teach you to do them and then even then it'll take some time and then the story shifts and for many people the main portion of the story is the prodigal the younger son this is a story about how sinful and how wicked and how terrible the younger son was and about his true repentance and his humility to come back to his father and then it's about the grace and the love

and the compassion that the father had toward the son that he looked and saw him from a distance and he ran and he hugged him and there's songs written about it stories that are told and this part that we're about to read becomes kind of the afterthought the unfortunate ending of the whole thing when I think this is what

Jesus was driving at the whole time this is the main point of his teaching as he's getting to the scribes and the Pharisees and he's letting them know this is where you're at and it's time for you to repent of your wickedness and your terrible deeds and the way that you think okay look at what he says his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house he heard the music and the dancing and he called one of the servants and asked what's this all about it's not a festival day it's just another normal day on the ranch on the farm what's going on and he said to him servant said to him your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound it's time to celebrate okay now get this the older brother still had his inheritance intact the younger brother lost it squandered all of the inheritance that consequence doesn't go away he's still brought back into the family he's still welcomed with open arms he's still treated as a full-on son but he has that consequence of giving up that portion of his inheritance because it's gone it's squandered it's not coming back does the older son think he's going to lose some more what's going on in his mind we don't really know but he was angry he was angry remember the

[37:23] Pharisees and the scribes they were grumbling does that describe someone who's angry with Jesus for eating with and welcoming sinners and tax collectors he was angry and refused to go in I'm not going in there with that younger brother of mine his father came out and entreated him son listen you know your brother he's come home we've got to celebrate come but he answered his father look these many years I have served you I have never think about now a Pharisee I have never disobeyed your command didn't he just disobey him seconds before didn't he come we must celebrate come in enjoy the celebration rejoice with us come no sir you are not righteous father you are not honoring

God by doing this with my younger brother I have never disobeyed you what kind of a mindset thinks this way I've never well this is how the Pharisees thought I am perfectly righteous look at me look at the way that I fast look at the way that I pray in public look at the way that I give at the temple look at all these things that I do for God and you people when I go to the temple and pray I'm able to look at that guy behind me who's beating his chest and saying woe is me Lord thank you for not making me like him because I'm better than is that an affront to God is that not sickening to a truly holy

Lord I have never disobeyed your command yet you never gave me a young goat never mind a fattened calf that I might celebrate with my friends this is what I wanted but when this son of yours came who has devoured your property with prostitutes how did he know that you killed the fattened calf for him almost as if he's saying you're celebrating his sinfulness father instead of pointing your finger and rejecting him as anyone who is truly righteous would do you said welcome home and you've encouraged his wickedness his terrible deeds his father said to him son you are always with me all that is mine is yours but it was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead he's alive now he was lost he's found

Jesus why why would you hang around with sinners tax collectors these terrible people why would you eat dinner with them why would you go into their house and celebrate with them why would you do that remember the story we started with the wallabies and the wombats why I picked Australian animal names I don't know I didn't want to I wanted to make sure I didn't pick anybody's real last name do we ever look at people maybe on our TV screens our computer screens our phone screens or people around us and make judgments and condemn instead of having a heart that breaks because they're lost and because we need to show compassion for them to demonstrate God's love to them to show them the love of the father kind of love that he has demonstrated toward me I think most of us can identify with the prodigal most of us can look at our own lives and say yeah there's been a time in my life where I was in rebellion and it might not have been as extreme as what this guy did but yeah I can identify with the prodigal but get enough years under you get enough years of coming to church and living a good life thinking that you know I've been saved 10 20 30 years and now I'm a righteous person now and I can look down on some of these other

people and say things about them think things about them the way that the wallabies thought of the wombats and we need to be careful that we don't become like these

[44:28] Pharisees these Pharisees in this story I don't believe they were even saved I think their religion it was all outside it was all external it was all religion there was nothing personal there was nothing sincere there was nothing heartfelt it was all they could get what they wanted with it and what they wanted was money and more and prestige and honor from the people around them and Jesus was saying you're in danger you're in danger because you're like this older brother who's bitter and resentful and it's going to cost you next week when we come back we're going to look at this again and we're going to look at each individual character and look at what makes them different or unique from the other and tie this all back up together again so I hope that you're able to come back again next week keep your notes we'll have some extras for you when you come back in case you forgot them at home but look forward to that next week so let's go ahead and close in prayer and we'll be done

Lord thank you so much for your word thank you for this word these parables these stories that are meant to teach us that are meant to alarm us that are they're meant to shake us to look deep inside and to say who can I relate to the most in this am I like the prodigal the younger son and maybe there are some in this room who can even so relate to that that and right now you're kind of living in rebellion my prayer is that you would go to the Lord run to him some of you might even relate to the father in the sense that you've got in your own family a prodigal someone who has run far from God and far from you and like the father you're waiting longing for the return of your child but I think many many of us can relate to the older brother to feeling a little bit self righteous to having a feeling of maybe I'm better than I pray that we would be more careful to remember what we have come from how much we needed God's grace and mercy in our own lives let us reject any of this pharisaical thought any of this harboring of this idea that

I'm better than that I am righteous of myself that I know why God chose me I know that I make a good one for the team that kind of mindset Lord may we reject that and may we humbly! remember your grace and your mercy how much you love us and how much we are called to demonstrate that love to our neighbors and our co-workers and family members and people in the community who are far from home and who need someone to point them to the father to remind them of just how gracious you are or maybe to point them in your direction for the first time so they can see your goodness your grace and your love Lord we love you you are so good to us even though we fail you so often but

[49:59] Lord we thank you that you are like the father of this story thank you for that grace that mercy that love may we never take it for granted we ask all of these things in Jesus name and all God's people said amen all right thank you for coming hope you have a great week thank you thank you