

Luke 15:1-32

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Date: 03 July 2016

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[0 : 00] No? There we go. Hey, how about that?

Woo! There we go. Well, if you all will pray with me as we look into God's Word together, that'd be great.

Father, we come to you tonight thankful that you are God who has not left yourself unknown and unknowable, but you have revealed yourself and you have given us your Word, this book, the Bible, to speak to us.

And Lord, we praise you tonight for the story that we are going to read together and for the way it reveals the kind of God you are. Lord, I pray tonight that by your Spirit we might see these things rightly.

And as we see them rightly, we might also rejoice in them and embrace them and make them our own. God, we know that only your Spirit can do this, so we ask for your help tonight.

[1 : 07] Lord, I ask for your help. Give me words to speak. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. What does God think of you?

Have you ever asked yourself that question? I don't know about you, but when I think about it, the first thing that comes to my mind is, I know my stuff.

I know the moments when I saw the ugly of my heart rise up and just spew out the people around me. I know the times when I've used my words to crush those around me.

The times when anger or rage has just exploded like Kylo Ren in The Force Awakens when he just takes his lightsaber and smashes all the machinery in his control room.

Times when your selfishness exerted itself at the expense of those you cared about. Or the times when you fell in again into those destructive patterns that you've worked so hard to try to escape.

[2 : 21] Your mess. What the Bible calls sin. Our own willful sin and the effect of the sin of mankind that affects us in so many ways.

Does it haunt you? Does me? Does it ever make you think, can God ever accept me? Could I ever come back to God?

Could he ever really welcome me? The passage we're looking at tonight is for people like us who wonder those questions, who think about those things.

We're going to look at three parables. It's a fairly long chapter, so we're going to look at it in two chunks. But three parables that reveal God's heart and reveal something of our own heart as well.

And then the big idea, what I want you to hear, what I want to hear myself in the depths of my heart, is that God is a God who celebrates when repentant sinners are returned to him.

[3 : 27] And God doesn't just accept us, but he celebrates when people turn back to him, acknowledging how much they've messed up.

And that's the kind of God that we see in this passage tonight. So if you have been coming here, you know we're preaching through the book of Luke, the central part of it from chapter 9 to chapter 19.

We're in Luke 15, which is a very well-known chapter. The three parables are well-known. The third one particularly is the parable of the prodigal son. And so that's what we're going to look at tonight. As we look at it, you can turn. Do we have a page number in our pew Bibles? I don't know what it is. 8-7-4. Thank you. Thank you.

This is crowd participation tonight. So 8-7-4, Luke 15. As we look at this, what we've seen is that Jesus in chapter 9 turned his face towards Jerusalem.

[4 : 27] And he's headed. He's headed to his death. He's headed to the height of conflict with the world. And conflict particularly with the religious leadership of Israel in that day.

And yet in the height of that conflict where he dies, he also accomplishes the purpose for which he had come. To die on the cross for the sins of humanity.

To somehow do a work whereby God might reconcile us to himself. Where he might make a way back to God when we had no way.

And so this is what Jesus is heading towards. And as he's heading towards that, he's teaching and he's clarifying the nature of his mission. And he's doing so with increasing conflict.

To those around him. As we read, I want to just point out before we start reading. Notice verses 1 and 2 because it sets up the context of who is his audience and who he's talking to.

[5 : 30] So let's read. We're going to start by reading verses 1 through 10. And we're going to talk about those for a while. And then we'll talk about 11 through the end of the chapter. And that's what we'll see.

So let's read together. Luke chapter 15 starting in verse 1. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with him.

So he told them this parable. What man of 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? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls his friends together and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so 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.

[6 : 38] Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Typically, when we read parables, parables are stories that have one main point. Sometimes they have auxiliary things. Sometimes we see that happening. But typically, they have one point.

And the point here seems to be so clear. He's telling these stories. And then in verse 7 and verse 10, he gives the point. And there's a pattern that you see in both of these stories, in both of these parables.

Something of value has been lost. The one who is responsible for the thing that has been lost then goes and seeks to find it. And when he finds it, he then gathers his friends and neighbors around and says, Let's rejoice and celebrate because the thing that is lost has now been found.

[8 : 00] And then in verses 7 through 10, Jesus says, And this is the point. This is what God does when sinners, And by that he means people who recognize that they have rejected God, That they have lived outside of his laws and his commandments, And also they have lived outside of a real living relationship with him.

Those who have lived outside of that and sought to live independently of him, When they return, The heart of God is like the heart of the shepherd and the heart of the woman.

It is full of joy and celebration. And this is the main central point of these parables. And they're fairly straightforward.

There isn't a whole lot more to say. Some people have read these parables and think, Well, how is God like the woman? Or how is God like a shepherd? And you know, we could get into how those metaphors might point us to particular aspects of God.

But that's not the point of the parable. The parable is saying, Hey, you know how a shepherd is, right? A shepherd, when he loses his sheep, he goes to find it. And similarly, you know how it's like, If you lose a silver coin, What are you going to do?

[9 : 15] You'll turn your house upside down to find it. Because that silver coin is precious and worthwhile. And when you find it, You will throw a party.

Because the thing you've regained Brings great joy to your heart. And that's the way God is. God is like that.

He celebrates. Now, it's really interesting. If you notice, look with me at verse 7. Because he says a little bit more than just that. Verse 7, Just so I tell you, There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

Okay, that's the point overall. But then he goes on and he says, Then over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Now, who is he talking about here?

Because the Bible will tell us in other places, And clearly we see that Jesus, Throughout his ministry, Said that there is no one who is without sin in the world.

[10:13] No one who lives a perfect life. No one who relates perfectly to God. So what is he talking about here? Well, it's very similar to what happens in Luke 5.

If you go back to Luke 5, Jesus is calling his disciples and he calls a man named Levi. Now, Levi is a tax collector. And as a tax collector, He is the rejected of the rejected.

Because he's a traitor. He's a Jewish man who's working for the Roman oppressors. And he probably is stealing money from his Jewish neighbors along the way. He's pretty much a wretch and a lout.

And you would never, ever do anything with him if you could avoid it. You would want to avoid him. And Jesus calls him to say, Come and follow me. And he gets up and he leaves his tax collection booth and follows Jesus.

In fact, they go back and they have a party at Levi's house. And the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the religious leaders of the day, say this.

[11:15] The Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Those are the unacceptable people in the minds of these people.

Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus answered them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. This is a similar theme that you see throughout the scriptures.

Where Jesus responds incredibly graciously and welcome, with great welcome, to people who know their neediness. Who know that they can't do it on their own.

Who know that their own righteousness is never enough to please God. But, but, to those who think that by their religious duty, by their good deeds in the world, by their striving to be the best person they can be, by whatever your standard is of trying to be as good as you can be, if you think that by doing that, you are good enough for God, what Jesus says is, you don't even know what you need.

[12:43] You don't need my salvation, because you think you can save yourself. And that's a scary place to be. Jesus doesn't celebrate over those people.

But for those who know that they need him, for those who come, turn away from this life of independence, and this life of sin, and this life apart from God's commands, and his instructions, Jesus says, come, I'm going to throw a party.

I'm going to throw a celebration. Think. I want you to think for a minute. What is it that we do in our culture when we really, truly celebrate? Right?

It happens in, I think there's some, there's some unique circumstances in our culture today, where you see real celebrations. I was rooting for the Golden State Warriors, but when the Cleveland Cavaliers won the NBA championship a few weeks ago, when they arrived home on their plane from California, thousands, literally thousands of people were waiting for them at the airport, on the runway, waiting to cheer for them.

And when they emerged from their plane, people erupted with joy. with shouts of praise, with gladness in their hearts.

[14:18] The poor people of Cleveland who've been waiting over 50 years for some championship to celebrate. And finally, LeBron James, the Savior, came back and gave them one, and they celebrated.

And they had a huge party. And they went from the airport to a ticker tape parade in downtown Cleveland. And they worshipped the Cleveland Cavaliers.

And it's the same thing that happens when Beyonce gets up in a concert. It's honestly the same thing that happens at a Donald Trump rally. This celebration.

Now, let me say this. None of these things are celebrations that have their object placed in something worthy of what they're giving. Right? All of these celebrations are giving praise and glory and rejoicing in something far less important.

But I want you to see that when we use this to celebrate, sometimes we can be so stayed in church. We think, well, you know, those people out there can be crazy, but we have to be sort of, you know,

buttoned up and all serious about worship.

[15 : 33] You know? And worshipping God should be a celebration because the God that we serve celebrates. And what you see humanly expressed in our culture is something that we will do even much more greater in heaven and what we can do even now on this earth.

This is what God does. And this is God's heart. This is what he thinks when one sinner turns from their sin, repents, changes their mind and says, I'm not going to live that way anymore.

I'm going to come to God. God's heart is rejoicing. What a wonderful thing it is when someone who is lost is found spiritually.

This leads us to the third parable. As Jesus takes this point and he expands on it more. And one of the things that's so beautiful about this is Jesus is a masterful storyteller.

And he takes this core concept and he pushes it even further into the hearts of those who are listening and hopefully into our hearts as well.

[16 : 46] Let's look at it together and read the rest, the third parable starting in verse 11. Let's look at it together. And he said, there was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, father, give me the share, the property that is coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread?

But I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

[17 : 59] Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he rose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servant, bring quickly the best robe and put it on him and a ring on his hand and the shoes on his feet and bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate for this is my son who is dead.

For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found and they began to celebrate. Now, his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he received him back safe and sound.

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, look, these many years I have served you.

[19 : 19] I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. When this son of yours came who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

And he said to him, son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive.

He was lost and is found. So you see that the principle is the same. There is a celebration about one who was lost who is now found.

But, Jesus, the master storyteller, put some twists in here and in doing so he digs into our heart a little bit more. First thing I want you to see is that the thing that was lost, a son, wasn't just misplaced.

He didn't just wander off like a sheep. It wasn't just dropped under the counter. The son was culpable. He was responsible for being lost.

[20 : 35] And not only was he responsible for it, he was reprehensible in it. When he comes, when you go to your father in this culture and you ask him for your inheritance now, it's like saying, Dad, I wish you were dead.

I just want your stuff. I wish you were dead. It is an act of disowning your family and simply in a mercenary way wanting to get your inheritance without anything else. Not only did he then take that inheritance, but then he showed himself to be a wretch. He went and he squandered it in the worst possible way. And then, at the end of it, this good Jewish boy ends up in a field feeding pigs. Now, you may not know much about Jewish culture, but pigs were unclean animals, unacceptable to be eaten. You wouldn't touch them. You wouldn't raise them. You wouldn't have anything to do with them. The fact that he was feeding pigs made him the most pitiable and the most despicable person in the story.

[21 : 46] And as you're hearing this story as a Jewish person, you're thinking, I don't want him to be saved. I don't want him to be found.

He doesn't deserve it. He's left himself. He's made his bed and he should lie in it. And so, when the son comes to his senses, when the son in his heart repents of his sin and turns back and physically turns his way around and walks the long road back home, there's this anticipation that the other two stories don't pull out.

How will the father respond? Will it be the same or will it be different? Will it be, well, you got what's coming to you, didn't you? Isn't that what you would expect from God at this point?

But no. The son even prepares himself to humble himself. The son comes back. His repentance is true. He doesn't come back not in a demanding sense of entitlement like, I'm your son.

I know I blew it but you should take me back and treat me like I'm your son. He knows he blew it. His repentance is real and his heart is broken and he's just hoping that he might get undeserved favor from his father in the form of at least treat me like your servant.

[23 : 15] At least give me food to eat so that I won't starve. There's a reality about his repentance. But we still don't know how the father will respond. Till we get to, where is it?

Let's look at it together. Verse 20. He arose and he came to his father but while he was still a long way off his father saw him and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

The father's love is the same celebrating love that we saw in the first two parables. He comes and he runs out and the son begins his speech. I know I've blown it.

I know I'm not doing it. He doesn't even get to give his request to treat me as a servant. The father cuts him off in the middle of his speech and says, no, no, no. I'm going to treat you like a son.

The robe and the ring and the sandals are all symbols of being accepted in the family. You are now an honored part of this family. the son doesn't just say, yeah, you can come and live in the garage apartment.

[24 : 29] I'm not going to really let you in the house but you can at least get close. But he says, yes, it's a full embracing of the son. And he lavishes upon him these tokens of acceptance and of belonging in the family and then he lavishes on them the celebration of killing a fatted calf.

Something that they would have raised for a special occasion. It wasn't just a, well, you're back. Here's your hamburger helper for the day. He pulled out all the stops. They went to Pepe's. They didn't go to Papa John's. You know, he pulled out all the stops to get the best celebration for that. And you would think, wow, God's love, his joy over the return of a repentant sinner is so great. You think, that's great. That's the end of the story, right? No. Jesus has one more twist for us. One more exploration into our heart as he looks into this.

Because if you look in verse 25, you realize there's not one story in the story of the prodigal son. There are two sons. And the older son, who has always stayed at home, who has always been dutiful, who has always done what is right, but has clearly not quite acted like a real son.

[26 : 09] when he comes, he has the emotion that maybe many of us had when you think about the younger son. He doesn't deserve it. He should be thrown out.

The wretch, he ruined our family, took half of our fortune. He embodies that heart when he hears about what has happened.

It's interesting. The father then, just as he ran to the older, the younger son as he was returning, now again, the father goes out of the house to the older son, doesn't he?

He goes out to him in an attempt to bring him in. He says, your brother is back and we're throwing a party.

Come on in. verse 28, but he was angry. Look, this many years I've served you and I never disobeyed you.

[27 : 11] You never gave me anything. It almost seems like the older brother, like the younger brother, wanted his father more for the stuff than for the relationship.

That the older brother wanted all the perks of being the dude and the things that he had earned by doing the right thing, not a relationship with the father, but the status and the position and the privilege and the stuff that comes with being that dutiful father.

And then verse 30, you see the depth of his heart. But when this son of yours, right, I have disowned him. He is not part of my family. This son of yours come back.

You celebrated. And he says, I am not going to do that. And the parable ends not with a conclusion, but with a hanging storyline because it ends with the father saying, son, you are always with me.

It has always been. You've always had everything that I've had, but it was fitting to celebrate your son, your brother. You notice how the father calls him your brother, not my son, but your brother.

[28 : 31] Your brother who was lost is now found. You, it is fitting to celebrate that. And there is an inherent invitation at the end of this parable because it doesn't resolve.

If you know anything about storytelling, this doesn't wrap up. This is the climax of this part of the story. The tension is raised to this point. The question is, how will the younger brother or the older brother respond?

How will he respond to his father's expression of welcome and embrace? And the story ends. And I think, remember how I told you that in the audience there were two kinds of people.

There were the tax collectors and sinners and there were the Pharisees. And what Jesus is saying in this story is that God's heart for all people, both the people who know that they've completely blown it and wonder if God could ever accept them again and the righteous people who think they don't need God, think that they have earned his favor by the way that they have lived, think that they are good enough on their own.

The Father goes out to both of them in love and calls both of them to repent. To repent of your wild, sinful living and to repent of your best righteousness and to say, come in.

[30 : 01] Repent from your sinful self-justification and come in to the family. Come in to the household and come be a part of the celebration because I am a God who celebrates things that were lost that have now been found.

I am the God who celebrates sinners who repent and come back and turn to me. Which, of course, leaves us with a question.

Who are we in this story? Who are you in this story? Have you wandered off to a far land?

Far from God? Doing your own thing? Wasting your life? There is a God who is calling you to turn to Him and to return to Him.

He is ready to run to you and to embrace you and bring Him back. Or are you the religious dutiful type? You have done everything right. You cannot quite understand why life is not working well.

[31 : 18] Maybe you are one who hates to be corrected and can never be wrong. Thinks that God agrees with you all the time. These were the Pharisees of the day who thought that by their obedience by their descendants from Abraham because of their position in society because of their religious observance that they were acceptable.

It's so easy isn't it in our culture today maybe to think that if I'm a good church goer if I go to church and I give my money and I try to be a good person isn't that enough?

Doesn't God accept me because I am those things? And what Jesus tells us is no no you need to repent of those good things as much as the wild profligate has to repent of their sin but the heart of the Father is the same if you repent and come to me I will accept you.

but friends Jesus doesn't explain it fully in this story he doesn't tell us exactly how but in the storyline of Luke we know why Luke has put this here in this story because where is Jesus headed? He's headed to Jerusalem and what is he going to do in Jerusalem? He is going to go be crucified on a cross and up on that cross he's going to cry out my God my God why have you forsaken me?

[33 : 02] Father into your hand I commit my spirit this perfect son who did actually live the perfect life of obedience who was the older brother for all of humanity by his perfection he was cast out of the house so to speak he was removed from the father's favor and the father's embrace as he hung on the cross taking the judgment for our sin this Jesus as he's heading towards that event is telling this story so that us and all who heard him when we when now looking back we saw what Jesus

was going to do now we know what he has done he has died and he has risen from the dead and he now has removed all of the offense of both our wild living and our self righteousness he has died for both of these things and risen from the dead so that he might be the firstborn of a whole family of God and so he is not ashamed to call us brother and sister as we repent of our sin and come to the foot of the cross and celebrate what Jesus has done for us because through this now the father opens wide his embrace and says come to me come to me and be my son my daughter in my family forever friends this is the good news of the gospel and this is the hope that we have and this is what

Luke 15 is telling us about the heart of the father let's pray Lord we thank you we thank you for this beautiful parable and for the power that it has for it reminds us Lord of our self righteousness it points to how easily we try to justify ourselves Lord and it points us to you and to the kind of God you are that you celebrate us Lord that you rejoice when we are lost and then are found by you Lord because you are a great God who delights to save your creation Lord we praise you for that Lord help us I pray tonight to know Lord that this is what you think of us that you know our sin you know how bad we are and Lord you even know how good we are and see how far short it falls but Lord you love us and you've opened up your embrace for us in Christ

Lord may we repent and turn to you tonight we pray this in Jesus name amen well friends we have the privilege and the honor of it's fitting isn't it to celebrate the Lord's table Lord's supper after this after looking at this story we have the joy of being able to think of this as we come to the Lord's table what the Lord's table is a remembrance remembrance a remembrance of what Jesus has done for us a remembrance of a reminder for us on a regular basis this is why as the church we celebrate the Lord's supper on a regular basis so that we can so that we can remember because when we remember we are shaken out of our self-righteousness we are freed from the shame that might keep us from coming to God because this reminds us that at the cross

God dealt with our sin decisively forever if you are here tonight and you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior then this table is for you maybe you've been wandering a little maybe you've been convicted tonight that you've had a heart of self-righteousness and tried to please God and be acceptable in your own but if you've placed your faith in Jesus Christ repent of those sins and receive these elements receive them as an act of grace and a reminder of God's grace to you if you're here tonight and you haven't made that decision if you have not placed your faith in Christ then what we ask is that you wouldn't take these things because they're by taking them it's an expression of faith and belief we don't want you to do that lightly so if you haven't placed your faith in Christ we ask just let it pass by and instead consider consider what we've talked about tonight consider this parable consider

Jesus invitation instead of taking these things maybe you in your heart of hearts as you pray before the Lord would take Christ to be your savior tonight that would be a wonderful thing apostle Paul writes this for I receive from the Lord what I also deliver to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me we'll pass out the bread together and then you can hold on to it and we'll eat it together and as we do so we can continue to worship so