

**Outcasts: Extravagant Grace**  
**Sermon 7-9-17**  
**By Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**Luke 15:1-31**

*Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup>And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>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.’ <sup>10</sup>Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

*<sup>11</sup>Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ <sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and*

*celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.<sup>25</sup> “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup>He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup>Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.*

## **Message:**

(Play video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qwNvLzs2l4>) Have you ever had one of these moments? Where you can't find what you're looking for? You look every which way and yet you can't find it. I've done this many of times with my car keys. I don't have them in my pocket. They're not on the table. They're not on our key hook. Panic begins to swirl in my mind that I may have lost my car keys. Imagine what someone could do with them. They could steal my car and any valuables that lay inside. And then I look at my hand. The keys were in my hand the whole time, but I didn't register that they were there. But it gives me great joy and relief when I've found them. There is great joy in finding what is lost.

In our passage today, Jesus tells three parables that has to do with what is lost. The first 2 verses are very important because it sets-up the reasoning for the parables, “Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” Luke labels Jesus' crowd as “tax collectors” and “sinners.” Sinners are those who do not follow the law. And tax collectors are viewed as unholy, swindling and despicable people. Yet, Jesus is spending time with them as he eats with them. The Pharisees are grumbling at this because this isn't what a Rabbi is supposed to do. Those who are holy and righteous stay away from the wicked and sinners. They divorce themselves from all things deemed unholy. To the Pharisees, it is far better to follow God apart from sinners than to mingle with sinners in the hope that God might redeem them.

In the first parable, Jesus talks of a shepherd going after the one lost sheep rather than staying with the ninety-nine. This doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Logic would tell us that it would be smarter to stay with the ninety-nine than to go after that one lost sheep. By leaving the ninety-nine, you risk losing them. And

this is true. Especially because sheep are not among the smartest of animals. But Jesus' point comes in verses 5-7, "<sup>5</sup>When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup>And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' <sup>7</sup>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." Are you catching the connection Jesus is making with the Pharisees and sinners?

Jesus delivers another parable. This time about a lost coin. A lost coin among 10 coins. She searches and sweeps the house to find this one coin. I can imagine her spending hours upon hours searching for this coin. Don't you hate that? When you lose something that is very valuable. You know that it is within your home. You just can't remember where you placed it. So you spend hours upon hours searching for that lost item driving you to madness. And then when you finally find it, what do you do? Rejoice! "<sup>9</sup>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.' <sup>10</sup>Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Notice that Jesus uses a different variation of this same phrase in both parables in verses 7 and 10, "Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Jesus seems to be teaching the Pharisees and us something. Something so important that he feels he must emphasize it in multiple parables or stories.

Part of what Jesus is trying to draw our attention to is that we think we know. We think we know what is best for our lives. We think we know who God is and we have Him figured all out. So that we can put God in a box and set it up on the shelf and admire it from a distance. We think we know what is righteous and what is not. We may know the scriptures. We may know how to follow God's commands. We may be very knowledgeable. We may be book smart. We may know that we are supposed to come to worship on Sunday morning. We may know about the forgiveness, love and grace of Jesus, but do we live in that love and grace? Do we embody it in our everyday lives? It's ironic. We can think that we know God and yet be totally lost. We can think that we know God and yet be totally lost.

Our last parable is one many of you are probably most familiar with. The Parable of the Prodigal Son. For this last parable, I'm going to be referencing some from Timothy Keller's book, "The Prodigal God." He has some very enlightening and important points as we study this parable. In this parable, there are two sons. And the younger one asks for his right to his father's inheritance right now. In practice, this shouldn't happen until the father is dead. And yet the father agrees to it anyways. The son then irresponsibly goes and squanders his inheritance until he has nothing left. He finds himself in a pretty bad place. He

discovers how good he used to have it with his father. In verse 17, “<sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!’” “...when he came to himself...” means that he had some self-reflection and realized the errors of his ways. Notice in verse 18 and 19 that he doesn’t have grand notions of returning to his father and everything going back to things as they once were. He recognizes his wrong doing. And he understands his place as he rehearses his confession. “<sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” He is prepared to atone for his sins and live as a servant of his father from this day forth. He’s not expecting forgiveness. “<sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.” You have to understand that for a grown man to run in this culture was an undignified thing. The father is humiliating himself in this act. Before the son can even get his confession out, his father is running towards him, kissing and hugging him. “<sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’” Notice that the father doesn’t even acknowledge his son’s confession. He doesn’t demand repentance. He ignores the confession and leads straight to the celebration. Extravagant grace is indeed at work.

But the heart of our message today comes from this next section. So read and listen carefully. “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup>He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup>Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’” Probably in many sermons you have heard many people focus on the extravagant grace towards the younger son. And indeed, this is a story about extravagant grace. Because the younger son certainly didn’t deserve the gestures, love, mercy and grace of the father. But what about the older son? Remember how this

passage started out before Jesus told these parables, "...the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" Who is lost here? The older son or the younger son? Timothy Keller states, "The target of this story are not 'wayward sinners' but religious people who do everything the Bible requires. Jesus is pleading not so much with immoral outsiders as with moral insiders. He wants to show them their blindness, narrowness and self-righteousness, and how these things are destroying both their own souls and the lives of the people around them. It is a mistake, then, to think that Jesus tells this story primarily to assure younger brothers of his unconditional love."

Both sons seemed to demand the same thing at different points. The younger son demands what is rightfully his prematurely and squanders his father's inheritance. The older son demands that he deserves to celebrate his obedience and should have had the pleasure of enjoying the fatten calf with his friends. Both are different versions of "I deserve..." Keller says, "Neither son loved the father for himself. They both were using the father for their own self-centered ends rather than loving, enjoying and serving him for his own sake. This means that you can rebel against God and be alienated from him either by breaking his rules or by keeping all of them diligently. It's a shocking message: Careful obedience to God's law may serve as a strategy for rebelling against God." If you think about it, many of us aren't too much different. We may be the ones who have followed God's commands most of our life. We have been faithful and obedient. And so when something bad happens, we have this attitude of "I deserved better than this." Or maybe we see the pleasures and good fortunes of others and we say to God, "I deserve \_\_\_\_\_." That person over there doesn't deserve that. In so many words you say, "They are sinners! How can they get such wealth and good fortune and not me?" Can you imagine if God would give us things based upon this notion of "I deserve?" That you've worked for what God gives each and every one of us. If the grace and mercy of God were based upon our merit, we would all be miserable and destitute in this world. Because we cannot earn our salvation with God. But many of us may be more like this older brother than what we think.

As you may remember, I am the youngest of 4 children in my family. My brother and I are about 10 years apart. When I was about 10 years old, my brother was in college. And one weekend he came home from college. When he came through the front door everyone celebrated that my brother had come home. My sisters and my parents wanted to hear all about college and how it was going. As we were getting ready for dinner, my mom was asking me to do a lot of different things like set-the-table and fill the glasses with water. After so many requests, I began to feel like I was a servant. That I wasn't important. I wasn't getting the attention or affirmation that I deserve. So as we all sat down at the table, my mom

realized that she forgot to get something for the dinner table. She asked me to get it. My eyes filled with tears. I stormed out of the room and exclaimed, "I'm not your servant." I went to my bedroom crying and hoping that someone would come after me. No one did. After my tears were done, I walked out shamefully and realized that I wasn't going to get the attention that I felt I deserved. In my family, although I was the younger son, I was operating with the "Elder brother" mentality of the prodigal son parable. I couldn't celebrate that my brother was home because I was too focused on my own righteousness. What I had earned and deserved.

Keller says, "Jesus's teaching consistently attracted the irreligious while offending the Bible-believing, religious people of his day. However, in the main, our churches today do not have this effect. The kind of outsiders Jesus attracted are not attracted to contemporary churches, even our most avant-garde ones. We tend to draw conservative, buttoned-down, moralistic people. The licentious and liberated or the broken and marginal avoid church. That can only mean one thing. If the preaching of our ministers and the practice of our parishioners do not have the same effect on people that Jesus had, then we must not be declaring the same message that Jesus did. If our churches aren't appealing to younger brothers, they must be more full of elder brothers than we'd like to think." Ouch. I hate to say it, but we might be more like elder brothers than we'd all like to think. Especially when we have this mentality that we need to bring more people inside the church. With that mentality, essentially we are saying that we want more people like us. When Jesus isn't calling the Pharisees to create more people like them. Jesus is calling the Pharisees to see that their self-righteousness is not the work of the Kingdom of God. What did Jesus say in the first parable? "...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Is Providence Church a church full of righteous people who just want more righteous people like us? Or is Providence Church a people who speak the love, mercy and grace of Jesus to the broken hearted? Do we even have broken-hearted people that we are connected to?

If we want to guard against this older brother mentality, what are the signs to identify such attitudes? Tim Keller names many. One sign is, "Every time something goes wrong in your life or a prayer goes unanswered, you wonder if it's because you aren't living right in this or that area." "Another sign is that criticism from others doesn't just hurt your feelings, it devastates you." The last is, "...feel[ing] irresolvable guilt. When you do something you know is wrong, your conscience torments you for a long time, even after you repent. Since you can't be sure you've repented deeply enough, you beat yourself up over what you did."

What Jesus is calling us away from is this self-righteous attitude and staying within our comfortable boxes of Christianity. Jesus models for us in this passage and many others that for people to know God's love and grace we have to mix-it-

up with outcasts. Tax collectors and sinners are just a few of those outcasts. We can't minister to outcasts though if we have this older brother mentality. If we are not willing to mingle with the people who are "rough-around-the-edges" or those whom we deem unworthy of God's grace, then we are more like the elder brother than we might want to think. Jesus is in the work of redemption and grace. And so if we cannot rejoice and celebrate one sinner coming to know Jesus over and above our needs, then we do not know of the value of Christ's salvation in our lives. Listen to the excitement of this man in this video. (Play video at <https://youtu.be/6lutNECOZFw>) Can you imagine if we had this level of excitement about our faith in Jesus Christ? Can you imagine that if one person comes to know the salvation in Jesus Christ, that we would celebrate in this way? The kingdom would grow by leaps and bounds if we could rejoice together of this extravagant grace that Jesus extends to both the older and younger sons among us. Let us ask for God's grace of our older brother mentalities and live the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. Spreading the good news to the broken hearted and the lost in our community. Amen.