

**Luke: The Father's Love**  
**Sermon 3-24-2019**  
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**Luke 15:1-2, 11-32**

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>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. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

## Message:

(Play video at <http://www1.cbn.com/rebel-life-cant-beat-new-life>)

“Nothing's impossible, especially when God is in the mix...” Amen. Alexander didn't grow up in a wealthy home or even in a middle class home, but in a home steeped in the drug culture. All he knew was this culture. So it was only natural that he would get involved in this culture as well. He wasn't a law-abiding citizen. The only person that mattered was: ME. He was going to prove himself by dominating every person that stood in his way. It didn't matter who got hurt. In an effort to fill this gaping whole of hurt and rejection, he unknowingly sought acceptance and love in the gang life. He may not have admitted that at the time, but essentially he was raised parentless. His parents neglected him for the high of drugs and the drug culture. He was an orphan. He felt like rebellion was his only option. The beauty of this story is how God called him back to Him through his grandmother, the prison guard and reading Romans 8:12-17, “<sup>12</sup>So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup>for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ <sup>16</sup>it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” While fatherless on this earth, He could claim the Father in heaven as we are all adopted sons and daughters of the Father. The Father's love was so great for Alexander, that the absentee father of this world would not separate Alexander from “Abba! Father!”

In our parable told by Jesus, it is yet another example of the greatness of the Father's love. I'm sure many of you are familiar with this parable, as it is a popular one, but let's walk through it briefly anyways. “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.’” The reason we include verses 1 and 2 in our study today is because it is the preface for all three parables Jesus tells in Luke 15. These parables are intended to be directed towards the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes. Their disdain for sinners and tax collectors. The first two parables are about a lost sheep and a lost coin. Jesus ends both of those parables with a variation of “Rejoice with me, for I

have found (my sheep/the coin) that (I had/was) lost.” The emphasis being on rejoicing at things that are found rather than grumbling about a persons history or past misdeeds. And so the Prodigal Son story follows in this same theme, but it hits a little bit closer to home and to many of us may be more revealing than we’d like to admit.

“<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.”” The younger son seems to know that the father has some wealth and that it is his right to inherit part of this wealth since he only has one other brother. So he feels entitled to it. In fact, to make this request BEFORE the father’s death is an insult and even a capital crime. Yet, like the stereotypical youngest child, this youngest son gets away with it. I should know, I’m a youngest child. My older siblings constantly remind me of how spoiled I was and how I didn’t have as much responsibility as they, growing up, being that I am the youngest of four. The youngest son, in the parable, seems to get away with asking for this inheritance early. And youngest children tend to be a little more reckless than the rest. Or more kindly put, more adventurous. The adventures of this youngest son are a thrill at first, but don’t turn out so well in the end. “<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. [Jesus immediately paints the younger son in a negative light. “Squandered.” “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 [Some of us may say, “Well...that’s just bad luck.” Maybe. Maybe not.]. <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. [After spending all of his inheritance, he realizes that he has to work to make it in this world. A hard life lesson.] <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.” Now let me pause there for a second. How many of us at this point in the parable are thinking, “Yeah...he’s getting what he deserves!! This is like those people who think they can always get hand-outs and live off of the government!! You have to work to make a living!!” Uh oh...be careful. You might not like what you see in the mirror soon enough. Be careful of that justice and righteous attitude. Be careful.

In the next sentence, the youngest son “...came to himself...” Meaning, he’s finally acknowledging his sin, his folly. He realizes that he had a much better life, but he gave it up for a fleeting moment of wealth and adventure. He would be better off being a servant of his Father. ““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.” What we see in the younger son’s prepared speech is acknowledgment and desire to reconcile with his father. And one of the first ways he’s prepared to do this is by confessing his sin. He then shows contrition, he’s sorry, “I am no longer worthy.” Reconciliation can’t happen without admittance of sin/wrong-doing and genuinely apologizing. And then, finally, this is a bit surprising, he offers a petition, but not what we may think. We would think he wants to reclaim his former status. If that were so, some of us would say, “So typical. The child runs off with mom and dad’s money and then expects for everything to be the same when they return.” But that’s not what happens. “...treat me like one of your hired hands.” That phrase tells us that he knows that he is not worthy to reclaim his former status. He’s not abusing or taking advantage of his father. If he’s going to return, he expects the same treatment as a servant, not the same treatment as a son.

Here’s the most shocking part of the story, “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.” He ran. We probably expect the father to berate him and coax the younger son to gravel at his feet. We expect the father to be grumpy and disgruntled. To have wrath upon in him. But HE RUNS. This is an undignified action of a grown man in this culture. The father is willing to embarrass and humiliate himself to run towards his son. He wraps his arms around him and kisses him. We can tell by these actions that the father is glad to have his son returned. Of course, the son goes through his spiel of confession, contrition and petition, but the father totally ignores this. ““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!”” The father is overjoyed at the return of his son. Like the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin, the father is full of love, grace and joy at the return of this son. Shouldn’t he be angry? Shouldn’t he be upset? Shouldn’t he avoid being “taking advantage of” in this instance? He doesn’t care about any of those things. He’s just glad that his son has returned.

Remember that righteous attitude at being glad the younger son got what he deserved, that I mentioned earlier. Yeah...you’re not the only one. ““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!” Pause there for a second. If we go back to verses 1 and 2, who is the older son? The tax collectors? The sinners? No. It’s the Pharisees and the scribes. They’ve put in their dues and followed the law. They’ve put in the “hard work.” They’ve “earned” their living. And they’ve done all that, only to have their “reward” passed to one who is “less deserving.” While we may celebrate the joy and grace the father, that he shows to the younger son, what we don’t like to look at in this parable is how much we are like the elder son. And if we take verses 1 and 2 into account, the emphasis here is not God’s grace, but a confrontation to the elder son attitude among us. Jesus is confronting the insiders of the faith culture. Jesus is confronting people like us, regular and faithful church-goers. Ouch!

These last few sentences tells it all though, “<sup>31</sup>Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’” What does the father say? “You are always with me.” The only thing the father desires is to be WITH his sons. The father doesn’t care about his wealth and riches. He says, “...all that is mine is yours.” I’ve noted in a few other sermons how I’ve been moved by a book called simply, “With” by Skye Jethani. He teases out the two foolish attitudes of these brothers that, unfortunately, are very prevalent among Christians and faith-goers. These attitudes are not God’s intended relationship with us. The first attitude, from the position from that youngest son, is that he valued his father’s gifts more than he valued his father. Jethani calls this “Life From God.” Meaning, bluntly, “What can I get FROM God?” It’s about exploitation. “I’ll follow you God if you give me \_\_\_\_\_.” Now, we might not say it that explicitly, but we think it. But here’s the rub, once we get what we want from God, we forget God or we run away with the blessing. How many of us want the blessing, but don’t actually want the relationship? How many of us have this intimate relationship with God when we’re seeking the blessing, but then when we experience suffering or pain, we say, where are you God? The only thing that forges an intimate relationship with God is when we need His blessings. That’s not a relationship, that’s exploitation. Jethani says, “We shouldn’t be surprised to find that when we fixate on what we can attain FROM God, we fail to experience the peace of his presence in our lives.” The younger son wants to exploit the father initially, but doesn’t actually experience the sweetness and peace of a relationship WITH him.

The second attitude is that of the elder son. The elder son’s reaction to the party held for the younger son may seem justifiable to many of us. He worked hard. He was obedient. He was loyal. He deserves the same reward. Throw him a party too!! If the younger son’s attitude was in the daylight, the elder son’s

attitude was in the dark. The younger son wasn't the only one exploiting the father. The elder son was exploiting the father too. The difference is that the elder son put in the work to earn the inheritance. And some of you may say, "rightfully so." But do you see how the elder son also didn't want a relationship WITH his father? He just wanted the father's gifts and blessings because of the hard work. There was little love in the relationship. There was probably hardly a relationship at all. The elder son's attitude is more socially acceptable to us because we believe that those who work hard should receive their reward. What if you work hard, you pray hard, you study the Bible hard, but you don't receive the reward you expect from our heavenly father? Will you love Him the same? Your answer to those questions should reveal the state of your relationship with God and where your heart is at. If I had to place the Church of the Brethren people as one of the sons, the elder son is where we are most vulnerable. I love that we pride ourselves in hard work and service to others, but this can easily produce an elder-son heart if we're not careful. We obey and follow the commands to get God's blessing, but we don't actually have a relationship with Him. And if I'm being transparent, this is one of my greatest vulnerabilities. To believe that if I work hard, if I pray more, if I study the Word more, that God's blessings, material or otherwise, will follow. I can easily fall into the trap of thinking that there is a formula to get God's blessings and if I just do these things right, what I want from God will follow. Jethani calls this, a "Life FOR God." We find our value in how we serve God, rather than simply taking pleasure WITH God.

Furthermore, the elder son's attitude may even be worse. Not only does his service to the father to get the father's blessings distance himself from the father, it also creates a wedge between he and his younger brother. How many of us have been divided from our brothers and sisters in Christ because we have younger son attitude (wanting God's blessings and then running away) or we have an elder son attitude (wanting God's blessings by manipulating God with our obedience)? Our exploitive efforts not only separate us from God, but also from each other. Because we place our focus on our brother and sister and what they are doing or not doing, we lose our focus from 'Abba' Father. Therefore, it creates division in the church.

Jesus, in these parables in chapter 15 is exposing the exploitive attitudes of the Pharisees and Scribes, but here's the good news. If your heart is hurting with guilt and conviction at realizing that you are more like the younger son OR the elder son, the good news is that the Father still loves you. The key difference between the younger son and the elder son is that the younger son acknowledges his sin, he repents, he confesses and he seeks forgiveness. The father didn't need it, but it opened up a relationship with him. The younger son saw the father's great love and came to appreciate it. The younger son re-established a relationship

WITH him. The elder son didn't re-establish a relationship with him as far as we know. The goal of these 40 days of prayer is not for you to check-off all those things on the prayer guide. To appease God for blessing. To give you more things to do or to entice you to have a life living solely in servitude to God. These 40 days of prayer are intended to help you appreciate and experience the peace of a life WITH God. It doesn't hurt to request prayers. It doesn't hurt to praise God in our prayers. Jesus instructs us to do both. What God wants most is to love on you and to be WITH you. And for you to be WITH Him. In His plan and His purposes for you. To comfort you. To hold you. To hug you. To care for you. To celebrate with you. To be joyous with you. To free you. If you find yourself in this position where you are trying to exploit God of blessings, I invite you to repent today. And here's the sweet part, as you come to appreciate being WITH God, because your focus is on the Father, you will find unity with your brother and sister in Christ. As each of us experiences a stronger relationship WITH God, I can only imagine the peace which surpasses all understanding, that we will experience. Folks, enjoy the Father's love. It's sweet. It's wonderful. I pray and hope that you will experience what Alexander experienced in our video earlier and cry out to God, "Abba, Father" and experience the intensity of His love for you. That as children of the Father, we will be joint heirs with Christ. Soak in the endless love of the Father. Amen.