

Grace to Spare

Luke 15:11-32

This morning we are going to take a break out of the Book of Mark and look at what many have called the greatest short story of all time; in and out of the Bible.

The story is found in the 15th Chapter of Luke, so you can open your Bibles there before we get started.

This story is commonly referred to as “The Prodigal Son” and is easily one of the most well-known parables told by Jesus.

It’s often called the prodigal son based on the one son’s actions, but it is very important to note that there are **two sons**, not just one.

And although we can all relate to the one or both at some point in our lives, you could easily title the story as “**The Loving Father**”.

The father is mentioned at least 12 times throughout the story.

And what I hope this morning is that I can show you how the story focuses more on the grace and mercy of the father than the sins of the sons.

But, before we get into the story, let’s consider the context of the setting by looking at **Verses 1-3**.

It’s important to note who Jesus is speaking to here.

He has a mixed crowd of tax collectors, sinners and the religious people of the day.

Tax collectors were hated because they worked for and represented the Romans and they would overtax the people and keep the extra money for themselves.

Sinners were the outcasts who broke God's law. They were looked down upon by the religious.

Sinners could range from prostitutes to thieves, to you name it.

But also notice the Pharisees and the Scribes are close enough to hear, and they are complaining about the fact that Jesus would receive sinners and even eat with them.

They were the moral and religious people of the day. In their eyes, they upheld God's standards. They fasted twice a week, they prayed religiously, including long, loud, rehearsed public prayers.

Most commentators point out it is to them that Jesus spoke this parable, but don't forget the sinners and tax collectors have drawn near to hear Jesus, and this morning, you are can hear, and I pray that Jesus will speak directly to you from His Word.

Let's Pray

Ok, let's look at the story together.

And in case the words are not in red in your Bible, remember, this story is being told by Jesus, Himself.

So, there in your Bibles, let's look at **Luke 15:11-19**.

I. Searching for Happiness

We are introduced to both sons in the very first verse of this story, and both are important, but if we were to break this story into two parts, the younger son is the focus in **Part 1**.

Notice, he comes to his father, and he says, "Father, give me."

Give me my inheritance.

Now, he was entitled to around 1/3 of the father's livelihood, since he was the younger son.

But it would not be normal for the father to divide up his livelihood while still alive.

It's as if the boy was saying to his father, "**I wish you were dead**, so I could have what you have."

But I don't want to wait until you're dead, I want the portion of goods that falls to me now.

In fact, in substance, the younger son is really saying this to his father, "I don't want you. I want your money."

But you have to understand the difference in times we are reading about here.

This is not the same as your son coming to you and you giving him 1/3 of your money from your bank account and sending him away.

I don't know if you know this or not, but they didn't have bank accounts back then.

It says the father divided his livelihood.

In other translations, it reads that he divided his property.

But understand **the word used for livelihood or property here is the word bios, which means life.**

He divided up his life to give the younger son 1/3.

Think about it...the father's livelihood would be found in land, livestock, goods and much more.

In order to give this son the 1/3 that he was demanding, the father would have to sell his land and other property.

The father would have lost his respect and honor within the community.

By demanding his 1/3 of the inheritance, the younger son would have brought shame upon the family.

The father could have and should have according to the law dealt with this in a much different manner.

This son could have been driven out of the house and kicked out of the family.

It could have gotten physical, violent or even led to the son's death.

But we read the father divided his livelihood and gave the son what he had asked for.

Think about that, the father's love allowed the son his freewill to leave.

Now, he didn't tell the son to leave.

You know he didn't want to see his son leave.

You know it broke his heart.

His youngest son had turned his back on him, had refused a relationship with him and was now leaving.

But the father did not withhold anything from his son.

In this way, some refer to this parable as the prodigal God.

Now, before you ask Rich to never let me preach again, here me out.

Dr. David Jeremiah says the word prodigal ***“is often thought to mean wayward or rebellious, but the word actually means recklessly spendthrift.”***

While the prodigal son behaved this way, so did the father; he gave his sons everything they asked for and showered them with gifts.

God is Himself a prodigal Father – spending His love extravagantly on His children from start to finish.

Of course, there is a difference in the prodigal living of the younger son and the prodigal giving of the father.

The prodigal giving of the father was driven by love.

The prodigal living of the son was driven by selfishness, rebellion, sin, greed, etc.

But why?

Why did this son even want his inheritance now?

We aren't told exactly, but we have the context of the rest of the story, which gives us a good idea.

I would argue that he is unhappy.

He is dissatisfied.

He is searching for happiness.

He wants to live his life.

He wants to do things his way because he knows how to make himself happy.

No rules, no boundaries, no guidance needed.

So, he comes up with an idea.

Dad, give me all the money that's coming to me when you die.

And I'm out of here.

I'm onto the good life.

The big city.

I'm going to live it up.

Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and then journeyed to a far country.

But you see, this boy was already in the far country before he ever even left his father's house.

The far country doesn't merely relate to distance.

We can be in the far country right here, right now.

In fact, some of you sitting in here today are in a far country.

Some of you have been wandering around in the far country.

Because the far country starts in our hearts.

The far country is representative of being **apart** from God.

But I can't help but notice that the son didn't leave immediately.

He didn't stay long but he did remain for a period.

I can't help but compare this to many of our searches for happiness.

This boy is dissatisfied and perhaps he thought that the money and goods alone would be enough to bring him satisfaction.

But he couldn't find it, so he carried on in his search.

The money didn't make me happy, but I just need to get out of this place.

It's this environment that's wearing me down.

It's this job. It's these people. It's this marriage. It's whatever.

I've got to get out of this town.

So he goes.

And look at it with me...In the same sentence we are told he went on the journey, we are told he wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

Well, that didn't take long.

But he doesn't stop there with simply wasting his possessions.

He goes on to spend it all; foolishly, recklessly.

Again, he was searching for happiness.

But **Wiersbe** said, “*A dissatisfied heart leads to a disappointed life.*”

He’s spent all and a famine arises.

Isn’t it interesting that the famine didn’t come until he had spent it all?

Isn’t it more interesting that he didn’t just go home right then and there?

Or how about before?

The story could have told us he had wasted his possessions with prodigal living, so he went back home before he had spent it all.

He realized this wasn’t going to work out, so he left that country, returned home and said, “I’m sorry Dad. That was stupid.”

Nope, he didn’t do that.

Even after he had wasted his possessions and then spent it all, he didn’t go home.

You know, rock bottom is different for everyone.

And a wakeup call from God is different for all of us.

How many of us get to what should be a giant hello from God, but we think we can still figure it out?

So, that’s what he tries to do.

He has no money and he is in want, so he sets out to figure it out himself.

He goes and he joins himself, which literally means “glues himself” to a citizen of another country.

He’s found the answer, so he thinks.

How many times do we think we’ve found the answer?

In steps the new girlfriend or the new boyfriend.

The new truck or the new toy hauler.

The new job or the new house.

Whatever you thought would make you happy.

Or whatever you thought would fix the issue.

Oh, but remember, you were in the far country before you ever left, and you're still in the far country trying to solve your problems.

Now, you're just in the far country with a new truck.

Now, look at him, a Jewish boy feeding pigs.

So hungry that we read he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods the pigs ate.

We are told that no one would give him anything.

He's reached the end of his rope and then God greased it.

You think God won't give you more than you can handle, but let me ask you this, if you could handle everything, would you realize you need God?

Now, he can't solve the problem.

He can't figure it out.

It's too much for him to handle.

He's hit rock bottom.

You know sin is like that. In fact, **Hebrews 11:25** tells us there is pleasure in sin....for a season.

Because sin will catch up with you...every single time.

It will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to pay.

It started in the boy's heart. It began as a thought.

He longed for something more, and I'm sure he thought happiness was just around the corner.

He had gotten his inheritance; not happy.

He had gone into the far country; not happy.

He had spent all his money; not happy.

He got a new job to try and make ends meet, knowing that soon he would figure it out; not happy.

Then, in **verse 17**, something happened that could've happened way back at his father's house and he wouldn't even be in this predicament.

He came to himself.

He hadn't been in his right mind and he realized how foolish he had been.

He looked around and realized it was too much for him to handle.

This boy started thinking to himself.

My father's hired servants have it better than me.

They've got bread and even enough to spare, and I'm perishing with hunger.

Literally I'm starving to death.

He thought of his father's goodness, and it was his father's goodness led him to repentance.

Not judgment, not fear...but goodness

Romans 2:4

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

We don't read about the son focusing on his specific sins, but instead, simply the fact that he is a sinner.

But he didn't stop there.

He focused on the father. My father is good to the hired servants.

Even they have bread.

His perspective has changed from focusing on himself to focusing on the answer; the father.

If he had simply focused on the fact he was a sinner and dwelled on his mistakes, sins, and how he had completely blown it, he would have only had regret and remorse.

He would've stayed there stuck in the pigpen.

2 Corinthians 7:10

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

The boy prepared a speech to tell his father.

I have sinned. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.

At first, he said give me, but now he says make me.

Oh, what a heart change.

But he still doesn't quite understand the love of the father.

In his rehearsed speech, he says, "Make me like one of your hired servants."

The hired servants would be on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

There were bondservants then servants that the bond servants would hire and then there were the hired servants or hired men that the son mentions.

These hired servants were equivalent to day laborers that would be brought in for a specific task such as harvesting a crop.

They had zero standing and could be fired at will.

So, the younger son is essentially saying making me like one of the laborers who has no standing since I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

Then I can work for you and earn back the money that I've wasted.

I can earn my way into the family.

Let's see what happens.

II. Joy found by grace received.

Look at **Verses 20-24**.

When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion.

You think the father knew his son was coming home empty handed?

Verse 14...but when he had spent all.

All means all and that's all all means.

The father knows.

This boy has been slopping hogs and nearly starving to death.

I doubt he looks good.

I doubt he smells good.

But the father doesn't care about any of this.

The father has been looking for him, had to have been, because when he was still a great way off the father saw him.

And he had compassion.

Splunk-needs-a-ma

It means to be moved as to one's **bowels**, hence, to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity).

Literally overwhelmed with compassion.

The father is so moved to his very core that he pulls up his robe, bearing his ankles and knees and runs to the son.

You've got to understand this is against all cultural norms of that day.

It was considered highly **undignified** for a first-century male to run.

Kids ran, young men maybe, women perhaps, but not men, especially older men who were fathers.

Where's my stuff? Where have you been? Why do you smell like hogs?

Nope, the father never asks any of these questions.

Instead, he falls on his son's neck and showers him with kisses.

Over and over is what the original texts leads us to believe.

The boy starts his speech.

Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son...

But the father cuts him off.

He never gets to tell him of his plan to fix what he's wronged.

Why?

Because he can't fix it, only the father can.

Bring out the best robe, no doubt, the father's.

Put a ring on his finger, no doubt the signet ring, which was used in financial transactions.

Imagine that, do you remember what this younger son did with his 1/3 of the estate?!

Put the signet ring on his finger. Give him authority.

What?!

Put sandals on his feet...he's not a barefoot servant, he's my son!

Kill the fatted calf and let's party!

And why, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

We read they began to be merry, but we find out not everyone is.

Part 2

III. No joy, as grace is refused.

Verses 25-32

The older brother never left home.

He had never gone against his father.

He had been serving his father for many years; yet, **the older brother was and is today still in more danger than the younger brother.**

The younger brother recognized he was lost. He hit rock bottom, and it became clear to him.

But, the older son has been doing all the 'right' things.

He's moral, he's religious, he's not the 'bad' one.

The older brother was lost and more **alienated** from his father than his little brother, and he didn't even know it.

Years of bitterness, anger and frustration boil over in an instant.

Chip Ingram said at a party of this sort, the older brother was to be inside acting as the Maitre (May tra) D, meaning he would be responsible for greeting people and would be a representative of the family, so the father would be free to do whatever.

But where is he?

He won't even come into the house.

Don't you know others would be asking, "Where is your oldest son?"

In ancient times, the correct response or the expected response of the father would be to go out and deal with this son harshly.

Maybe have him tied up and whipped or maybe just tied up so you could deal with him later.

But look at **Verse 28** again.

His father went out and pleaded with him.

Please come in the house son. Celebrate with us. Be a part of the family.

But the son says Lo, which is behold or Look you!

Are you kidding me? I've been serving for you all these years and you've never even given me a young goat to have a party with my friends.

How could you?

This son of yours, notice, not my brother, this son of yours blew all his money on women and you have the audacity to kill the best calf we have for him.

How could you?

Man, if the father wasn't justified to let into the son earlier, he sure is now.

Who do you think you're talking to?!

No, what does the father do?

He says, Son, which is an affectionate, tender call...**my child**, you are always with me and all that I have is yours, but as far as we know, the older brother refuses the father's grace.

But, I think Jesus left it open as to what happened because it was up to the older brother.

Whoever that older brother is...he could come and receive the **grace**, or he could stay outside and refuse the **grace**.

So what about you?

IV. Practical Application

Remember, when I started this message, I said it was important to recognize who Jesus is talking to here.

I said many commentators point out, and rightfully so, that Jesus is addressing the Pharisees and the Scribes.

But, in my opinion, you cannot leave out the tax collectors and the sinners. And even more importantly you cannot leave out yourself.

The Book of Hebrews tells us God's Word is alive, active and sharper than any two-edged sword.

So what about you?

Who are you in this story?

Are you the younger brother prior to the reconciliation?

Do you think you are too far gone?

Do you think your sin is too big?

Quit focusing on your sin and focus on the Father.

You are never too far from God to come to Him.

God is only a **prayer away**.

If you've never placed your faith and trust in Him, today is the day.

If you've been running from God and you've found yourself in the far country, today is the day to return.

Timothy Keller put it this way, *“God’s love and forgiveness can pardon and restore any and every kind of sin or wrongdoing. **The younger brother knew that in his father’s house there was abundant “food to spare,” but he also discovered that there was grace to spare.**”*

So, to the older brothers in the room:

Have you been playing religion? Have you been trying to work your way to God and trying to earn God’s love?

Are you just playing church or do you have a relationship with the Father?

There was **grace to spare** for the elder brother as well, but as far as we are told in the story, he refused it.

And, of course, the elder brother represented the Pharisees and the religious leaders, but notice Jesus was pleading with them. Pleading with His deadliest enemies to receive His grace.

And it’s His love that initiates this process.

It is God coming after you.

Notice the father went out to both sons and loved on them.

It wasn’t the repentance of the younger son that brought about the father’s love.

No, it was the father’s love that brought about the repentance.

Both sons had rebelled.

One had left home, the other had stayed.

Both had embarrassed the father and brought shame and guilt on him.

Both had broken the father's heart.

But now one was home and enjoying fellowship with the father, but the other wouldn't come in the house.

A point that is being made here is that forgiveness comes at a cost.

Forgiveness is free to the person being forgiven, but it cost the person who is offering it.

When the younger son was reinstated as an heir, it would have cost the elder son dearly.

Now, the younger son is entitled to a 1/3 of what is left after he decimated the estate to begin with.

The elder brother is not willing to forgive the younger brother.

He is not willing to pay the price.

Timothy Keller offers this:

*“Jesus does not put a true elder brother in the story, one who is willing to pay any cost to seek and save that which is lost. It is heartbreaking. **The younger son gets a Pharisee for a brother instead.**” Timothy Keller*

“Think of the kind of brother we need. We need one who does not just go to the next country to find us, but one who will come all the way from Heaven to earth. We need one who is willing to pay, not just a finite amount of money, but at the infinite cost of His own life to bring us into God's family for our debt is so much greater.”

Jesus, God's Son, fully-God, fully-Man, has already paid the price for your sins.

This is why the Gospel message is so radically different than both brothers approach to try and earn the father's love.

No matter which brother you are, God loves you, and His amazing grace is more than enough to **spare** for you and for the whole world.

If you are lost, be found today!

He's waiting with open arms and His response to you would be the same as it was to both sons.

One of love, tender mercy, full of grace and compassion.

Everyone in the entire 15th Chapter of Luke had **joy** except for the elder brother.

Won't you have joy today receiving Him?