

## The Gospel for the Religious and Irreligious Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Next to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, this is probably Jesus' most famous parable.

But I think it's mistitled.

- It's typically referred to as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son."
- However, there are two sons in the story.
- You miss a critical aspect of the message by focusing only on one son.
- The **primary reason** it's told is probably to **confront the elder brother**, who represents the Pharisees/Scribes.
- *The elder brother needs **more than an attitude adjustment**. He's lost/dead.*

A better title would be, "**A Compassionate Father and his two very different sons.**"  
Not very catchy but apt!

**How many of you have two sons, or have a brother?**

Are the siblings alike or much different?

It's amazing how different two boys under one roof can be!

- **Now mine are from two different countries...**
- **I remember Dr. Shaddix telling me how different his two boys were.**
- **You know one of them – Pastor Shane. His brother, Clint, is a Navy Seal. Then there's Shane. Quite a contrast huh? (Story about the Safety and Care Team)**

But even though two brothers may be completely different, they both have **the same need: the gospel.**

That's what this parable is teaching.

J.C. Ryle calls this parable the "**most full and instructive of the parables.**"

He added, "**There is probably no chapter in the Bible that has done greater good to the souls of men.**"

It's amazing how much **theology** is here! God, Human nature/sin, Christ, Grace, Repentance, Heaven, Kingdom

- **All here in a story!**

It also gives **the grand story of the Bible: Being Reconciled to God. Creation, Alienation, Reconciliation, Restoration** (kingdom feast).

The big idea I want to get across:

**"There are two ways to be alienated from God and only one way home."**

Let's divide our study in three parts: (1) The Audience, and (2) the Parable, and (3) the Radical Message.

This is good for our souls. Care for your soul in 2017. Bodies are important (**Hip hop abs!**). This is better than hip hop abs.

**#1: THE AUDIENCE: (15:1-2, 3)**

Jesus always gives his parables in a context. Here, **two groups**: (1) sinners and tax collectors and (2) Scribes and Pharisees. (1-2)

- **Religious (Scribes/Pharisees):** The self-righteous
- The **"sinners"** guilty of **publicly known sin.**
- **Tax collectors:** cheaters and traitors. They were hated.

**v. 2: "this man eats w sinners."**

**Look at Luke 5:27-32 – notice the two groups. Religious/Irreligious**

<sup>27</sup> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>28</sup> And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

<sup>29</sup> And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. <sup>30</sup> And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>31</sup> And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

**Are the Scribes and Pharisees believers?**

**No. They're self-righteous people refusing to repent.**

**It's the same kind of audience here in Luke 15:1-2: religious/irreligious**

**v. 3. "So he told them this parable...."**

**This discussion at a meal triggers these parables.**

- Three parables that build on one another - "Or" (8), "And" (11)
- Jesus **has these two groups of people in mind**, as he tells these stories.

**There are two ways to be alienated from God.**

**Be lost in unrighteousness, or in self-righteousness ("those who need no repentance," 15:7) .**

This parable is supposed to cause us to **compare and contrast** these two brothers. We should also **participate in the drama** by asking, **"Which one are we like?"**

<b>Younger Brother Tendencies</b>	<b>Elder Brother Tendencies</b>
Irreligious	Religious
Innovative	Traditionalists
Non-Conformists ("self-expression")	Conformists
Rule Breakers - law to themselves	Rule Keepers
Immoralists	Moralists - earning salvation
"Chill" - peace	Angry
Work "When Inspired" (artistic)	Hard Workers - over workers
Visible Sinners (Facebook shows it!)	Invisible Sinners
Uses People	Condemns People
Unrighteous	Self-Righteous

**I don't mean you are always one or *always* the other.** It doesn't matter. In either case, Jesus is saying: **"You're both in trouble."**

**"There are two ways to run from God, and only one way home."**

That one way home is **repentance.**  
See theme of repentance: 15:7, 10, pictured in 15:11-24

Many want to divide the world into **"bad"** guys, and **"good"** guys.

But Jesus says no. There are **three ways.** 1) Bad guys, (2) those who think they're good, and (3) **repentant guys.**

- You can live like a **hedonists**. (Sinners and tax collectors). Unrighteous. Law to themselves.
- You can live like a **moralists**. (Scribes and Pharisees). Self-Righteous. Man-man rules. Lost in goodness.
- You can live like a **new creation united w/ Christ Jesus**.

### Let's play a game, Hedonist or Moralist?

Cretans	Circumcision Party (not my idea of a party)
Corinthians	Galatians
Woman at Well	Nicodemus
Rich Man (Lazarus)	Rich Young Ruler
Woman in Adultery	Pharisees
Barbarians	Self-made religion

They all need to be converted.

**There are three ways to live: hedonist, moralist, or new creation in Christ.**

A New Heart then leads to new behavior, that is, to conformity to Jesus.

Christianity is about the dead coming to life, as this parable teaches, **twice for emphasis (24, 32)**. "He who has the son has life" (1 Jn 5:12)

The early **Romans** recognized this.

**When Christianity first arose, no one called it "a religion."**

- The Romans called Christians "**atheists**" because of what they were saying about God had not been said before.
- They had **no temple, no priests, and no sacrifices**.
- Why? Because **Jesus ended them all**.
- **The Romans rightly labeled Christianity as something else.**

People today have two categories: **religion and irreligion**.

**Keller** says that the 99% of people who reject Christianity aren't rejecting Christianity; they're rejecting religion.

It is true there is a **good use of the term religion**, as James uses it (1:26-27), but that's not what most people think of.

- They Aren't thinking of biblical Christianity, but self-made, works based, human achievement religion that's dead.
- It doesn't bring life, it enslaves. It is powerless to transform.

**Self-made religion has no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**  
(Col 2:23)

How many of you know someone who said, "I said I was a Christian but it wasn't until later that I actually understood the gospel and was saved."

- Why? They had conformed to some external code, but not transformed.

**Who is more likely to people who come in the Gospels? Elder or younger?**  
It seems like its the *younger brother types* (Luke 7, John 3-4, Luke 19).

**"Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will come into the kingdom of God before you."**

**Matt. 21:31.**

**Only the humbly repentant will enter the kingdom.**

**We must tell people how to come home.**

**The New Testament** addresses these two groups of people regularly, but **most of the preaching I hear rails on the hedonists and coddles the moralists.**

- They **rail on the hedonists** (gay community, Las Vegas, Bourbon Street), *for acting like sinners.*
- **Where are the preachers who will say "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees?"**
- Who did Paul and Jesus reserved their **harshest words** for? The religious **moralists**. Remember **Matthew 23**, "Woe to you!" And Paul to the religious Galatians, "Let him be anathema." (Galatians 1).

## **#2: THE PARABLE (11-32)**

### **The Unrighteous Younger Brother (11-24)**

#### **A. His Rebellion (12-16)**

##### **11-12 – Outrageous Request**

- **He** essentially says that he doesn't want his father's stuff; just his own.
- This was a massive offense in Jewish culture. The father gives it to him.
- **He's not wanting to invest it; he wants independence, and to feed his flesh.**
- **It's outrageous. It's shameful.**
- He's saying, "I wish you were dead."

Something that's **curiously absent** throughout the prodigals journey is **the elder brother**.

- His job was to protect the name and reputation; and his brother. But he's absent.

### **13 – He heads for the "far country"**

- **I ran away once. Have you?**

**"Not many days"**– everything is gone in a few days

- **Modern day: Strip Clubs, Mardi Gras, Vegas, Manhattan – or College.**

**"squander," buying drinks for everyone; "making it rain"**

- **with prostitutes" (30) - reckless**

He thinks he will be more **happy** apart from the father.

That's the human struggle: **Can man be happy apart from God?**

- **For a season and at some level. But not ultimately.**
- **"All men seek happiness" - Pascal - only found in God.**
- **Every addict is looking for God at one level.**
- **We are restless until we find rest in God (Augustine)**

### **14 – He's Desperate**

He **"spends everything"** and there's a **"famine."**

- **Added to his horrible personal state, is an economic crisis.**
- **He can't find work. He's hungry.**

**15-16:** He's willing to work with pigs, and eat with them.

- **He looks like a mess.**
- **He needs rehab. He needs a bath.**
- **He needs to take an AIDS test. He needs a friend.**

### **16b – He's Isolated - "no one gave him anything"**

- **He has no money, but worse, no friends.**
- **He probably had lots when he was buying drinks.**
- **He could have sung w E Clapton, "No one knows you when you're down and out."**

**How many of you know some younger brothers who headed for the far country?**

**"self-expression," open rebellion // "alternative lifestyles" // hedonistic fantasies"**

**His Status. He is...**

1. **Empty** - the weekend is over, and he is hungry for food, a job, meaning, hope.
2. **Enslaved** – **Sin is deceptive.**
  - **You think you're free, but you are a slave to your passions.**
  - "We were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures" (Titus 3).
  - **Sin's Ability to interest and satisfy a person quickly runs out.**
    - **Drugs** – Pot to Meth to Cocaine – this is higher, this is higher – before you know it you're in in the grip of enslavement
    - **Pornography** – Before long, there's not a picture he can look to satisfy his lusts. Spends all his money, loses marriage, family, all hope.
    - **Lying** – The liar can never get to the end of his lies
    - **Pride** – The proud can never get to the end of his pride
3. **Estranged** - he has no real friends.
  - Sin alienates you from God and people.
  - If you have the wrong identity, you will have the wrong community and the wrong mission.

Here's the question: Is there **any hope** for his young man?  
Is there any hope for someone like this today?

## **B. His Return (17-19)**

**17 –Awakening.** He "**came to himself.**" He's awakened.

- **Most of us probably wouldn't say that it was in a pig sty that your life was changed; but it happened there!**
- Have you been awakened to your need?

Everyone wants to "find themselves" these days.

- **Chris is college.**
- **To find yourself, you deny yourself and come to Jesus,** and there you find your true self.

**17b** - He begins to ask the right questions - what am I doing with my life?!!!

**"How many of my father's hired servants.... I perish"**

## **18 –Repentance**

- **"I will go to my father."** Turning to God.
- **"I have sinned."** No blameshifting, "It was my context" "the devil made me do it."
- Like **Psalm 51**, "Against you and you only have I sinned." –

- “against heaven” – as high as heaven...

## 19 – Humility

- He's putting his **plan together**.
- "See what had happened was..." If you've ever rebelled, you have to make up your story - flat tire, aliens, hobbits..."
- This is actually a good plan. It's humble. It's repentant.
- I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as a "**hired servant**." Speaking of Day-laborers it seems. They were low on the socio-economic ladder.
- The Father gave the day laborers, "**more than enough**."

He remembered that his father was sympathetic and compassionate and generous to the poor.

## C. His Reconciliation w the Father (20-23)

### Imagine the table scene

**20 – The Love of the Father.** Notice the action verbs.

His plan doesn't work. The Father comes out to him!

This love is unique. This love is scandalous.

**“He saw him”**

We can imagine that the Father had been constantly looking down the road hoping to see his son. Every time he would see dust, he would grow from hopeful to disappointed.

**“He felt compassion”** – The Pharisees say, “oh no!”

I think of **Psalm 103:13**, and this:

*How deep the Father's love for us,  
How vast beyond all measure  
That He should give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure*

**“He ran”**

- Women, children ran, not men. **“He look, it's Levi. Where's he running?”**
- **He's running like a man who's trying to stay warm.”**
- Imagine! He's running through town, sprinting.

**“He embraced him”** – He didn't wait for him to take a bath.

This son, with the stench of pigs, and a heart filled with shame, finds himself engulfed in his fathers arms.



- **Not a slap on the face.**

**You can come to God messy. Weary. In need.**

This hug is a picture of **full reconciliation**, of the Father receiving the repentant son.

- That pig-smelling sinner is new. He's loved.
- This is a great big hug.
- He didn't earn the hug.

**Gospel is not obey, and then you'll receive the hug;  
but rather  
You are hugged, so now obey out of love and gratitude.**

**"He kissed him"** – It says technically that he **"covers him with kisses."**

- A sign of forgiveness.
- This is similar to King David **2 Sam 14:33.**

**This guy is covered in grace.**

- Some dads need to be more affectionate.
- **Don't run on the football field**, but a kiss on the head; that's a good thing.

**21** – The Father never responds to the Son's speech, he just reconciles w/ him!

**How awesome is it that when the prodigal returned,  
the Father didn't throw a fit, but he threw a party!?**

Are you in the far country? **May the prospect of mercy lead you home.**

**22 - Best Robe - Honor.**

Every nobleman had a robe... expensive, ornate, embroidered, one of a kind – of the highest quality.

- **Same word - angels (Mark 16:6), glorified believers (Rev 6:11).**
- **Ring** – Dignity - Membership in Family
- **Shoes** – **Sonship.** Now, slaves customarily went barefoot. Only masters and their sons wore sandals.
- This was no small thing to those listening.
- **The Father didn't make him like a hired servant, he made him his son.**

**23- Fattened Calf** – Delicacy that was usually reserved for major occasions, like Day of Atonement. The whole community would come out.

It was prepared for special occasions.

- As a note of personal preference, I love that Jesus eats with sinners, and that Jesus mentions meat!!!
- He didn't say, "oh let's celebrate; let's have a kale salad!"
- "Creation, Kale, Redemption, New Creation" (Clint Barefoot)

What we're witnessing is the prodigal son experiencing the Father's prodigious generosity.

- As recipients of God's grace and magnificent generosity, we should naturally want to show grace to people.
- God's generosity fuels our generosity.
- His hospitality fuels our hospitality.
- IF you aren't a generous giver, then it shows that the gospel hasn't really saturated your heart yet.

What effect would this have had on the son's own generosity and hospitality in the future? What kind of person would he become?

- A recipient of such grace would have been like **Zaccheus**, abundantly generous like his father.

#### **D. Rejoicing (24)**

Let's celebrate because my dead son is alive!!

Celebration – **Luke 15:7, 15:10**

#### **The Self-Righteous Elder Brother (25-32)**

The younger brother apparently doesn't know what's going on.

- He has no relationship with his Father.

Enter the Pharisees.

**25** – He hears music and dancing! That will set any legalist off.

- They aren't dancing with a lampshade on their head; they're genuinely happy.

**Grace** makes you glad; legalism makes you mad.

Some of the scariest people in the world are angry religious people who don't know Jesus and his grace.

"When Barnabas saw the grace of God, he was glad." Acts 11

The essential response from the brother was, **“How dare you?”**

**26-27** – He hears the news. He should be in the party.

It is possible to be around the church your whole life  
and not enter the party.

**Illustration: 70 year old handing out bulletins**

**28** – The Father loves the elder brother as well. He entreats him to come in.

- **He refuses!**
- **“Angry”** – “explosive rage.”
- He breaks the two great commandments: love God and neighbor

**29** – He insults his father, **“Look.”** He doesn’t even call him **“father.”**

- His theology is a theology of works, of payback.
- “You owe me” theology.
- He has a boss, not a father.
- Many have that understanding of God. Tip for tap.

**“These many years I served you”** - slave relationship

**“I never disobeyed a command”** – He is keeping score, trying to earn favor.

The Pharisees had a theology of merit: tithing, rule keeping, fasting, but knew nothing of the grace of God.

He's his own Savior.

If Jesus is not the hero of your story, then your story becomes a tragedy.

**“I never got a young goat”** – how self-centered, a self-righteous.

Your own brother was a total train wreck; you should be celebrating, instead you’re complaining.

Those who have been changed by the gospel see serving the Father differently:

- It’s a privilege. It’s a joy.

Our reward is in heaven; we aren’t looking for material wealth or human praise.

### 30 – More self-righteousness

- “**This son of yours**” – condescension, another trait of the moralist.
- “**He devoured property**”
- “**He has been with prostitutes**” – now your eating!  
**He's repeating Luke 15:2!**  
**“This man eats with sinners.”**
- He is actually angry at the Father’s kindness.
- **He’s like Jonah!** THE Pharisees have no category for grace.

### 31 – The Father responds

"All is provided for you; come on in the party."

"All of the inheritance is yours, now come into the party!"

### 32 – It is fitting to celebrate! Death to life! Let’s dance.

- **"joy in heaven!"**
- Why joy? Sin is awful and grace is amazing!

If there is no *celebration*, it reveals a lack of *appreciation* of grace.

- When people come into the kingdom, we should celebrate.
- The Father celebrates!
- “**Ain't no party like the Jesus party...**”
- **Remember Jesus' first miracle? He's not a killjoy!**

Mission: **We should spend time with the tax collectors and sinners, like Jesus, so that we may do so.**

We are left with the question, “Will the elder brother go in?”

- We don’t know. **It’s a cliffhanger.**
- **All we know is that the majority of Pharisees responded negatively.**
- Nicodemous is the only one that comes to mind.
- How hard it is to reach religious moralists who are blind to their need?

Will he repent of his self-righteousness and hypocrisy, and receive forgiveness and new life from his loving Father?

Then, will he forgive and reconcile with his brother?

## What is Jesus teaching those at the table?

### **#1: The Love of God.** See God as Father.

Jesus presents God as Father.

- That is unique to people.
- God isn't a **lifeguard**, who is distant, and only comes in to help when you're desperate.
- God isn't a **butler** either. He's not just for you to call him up for a fluffy pillow to give you all of your desires.
- God is father.

God is "father to fatherless."

- About 40% of children in the western world will go to bed without a father.
- But we call God "Abba Father." The Spirit testifies that we are his kids!

*Jesus* paints this picture of God as Father, unlike any father – affectionate, generous, passionate, a lover of the rebellious.

If you have had a distant father, no father, or an abusive father, I want to say I am So Sorry.

And I also want to say: **Come to this One.**

Though God is majestic, transcendent and holy, he is also loving, forgiving, and near. "Abba."

### **#2: The Nature of Sin and Necessity of Repentance.**

Understand that Sin is Deeper than Visible Sins.

It's not just unrighteousness, it's also self-righteousness.

No one knew human nature like Jesus. "He knew what was in their hearts" (Jn 2).

The usual view of sin is the prodigal.

- There's no question that his recklessness/rebellion is sinful and shameful.
- But the older brother is lost in his perceived "goodness."

You are worse than you've ever dreamed, but you are more loved than you ever dared to hope.

You must repent of your goodness, not just your badness.

*Lay your deadly doing down  
Down at Jesus' feet  
Stand in him and him alone  
Gloriously Complete*

### #3: Salvation by Grace.

#### **A. Grace is expressed in the invitation and initiative of the Father**

- He goes out to both sons. Did you notice that (20, 28)
- He kisses the younger brother before he repents.

“His kindness leads us to repentance.” (Rom 2:4)

#### **B. Grace: Repentance not Repayment is needed for Forgiveness**

- The younger brother repents of his sins.
- He doesn't pay back a thing.
- The father embraces him and reconciles with him.
- The elder brother thinks he has nothing to repent of!
  - He is today's “self made man.”
  - You may have your cuffs starched, with your initials on them, but on your best day, you are just a dressed up sinner.
  - We all come into the kingdom as beggars.

Younger brother - "I have sinned"

Elder brother - "I have served you" "I never disobeyed"

#### **C. Grace: Jesus is the answer not the Pharisees.**

In the two parables that precede this one, the story is about **someone looking** for something that is lost.

Do you see that? (Notice it's a lady looking! That's a successful example)

In this one, no one goes searching for the younger brother.

In the beginning of the story there's no mention of the elder brother seeking his younger brother. (15:12-ff).

We know in our culture something about this.

Mom says, “**Don't come home without your brother!**”

Ryken says, "The elder brother does not fulfill his sacred responsibility to reconcile his family."

• The elder brother was "not his brother's keeper."

That's because the elder brother is a Pharisee.

The elder brother should have said this from the beginning: "I'll go look for him; I will give my inheritance, lay down my life for him."

But he has a resentful heart.

He is a pathetic elder brother.

Jesus shows the desperate sinners at the table that the Pharisees do not have the answers that they need.

They need someone else: they're looking at him in the face around a table.

**The good news is that we have the True elder brother!**

"He rejoices [not ashamed] to call us brother." (Heb 2:11)

For God so loved the world that he didn't send a Pharisee, he sent Jesus.

He came for us.

He paid the ultimate price.

He rescued us.

He was stripped naked of his robe and his dignity; so that we could be dressed in his robe and have his dignity.

In him, we have obtained a glorious inheritance.

We are the little brothers and sisters of the crown prince of the universe.

**We have a true elder brother, who left heaven itself to rescue us from the pit of sin, now there's no condemnation, only everlasting joy to all who will repent and come home.**

*Oh, the love that sought me!  
Oh, the blood that bought me!  
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold,  
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold*

Now ***we want*** to serve our Father. Like Newton says:

*Our pleasure and our duty,  
though opposite before  
since we have seen his beauty  
are joined to part no more.*

Let's spread the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the sake of the younger and elder brothers in our congregations, and **when they repent, let's party.**

**"Joy is the serious business of heaven"** (Lewis)

- Let this love fuel obedience, generosity, hospitality, orphan care, care for the poor, the immigrant, the addict, the prostitute, the student living in the far country, and for the person enslaved in some legalistic religion.
- Let it fuel evangelism.
- Let it fuel worship. Even now.