

# Luke 15 (Part 2): 11-32 • What the Prodigal Son teaches us about the heart of God

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All right. Luke chapter 15. This is the second part. We're picking it up in verse 11 and reading through the end of the chapter. Follow along as I read. It goes like this:

*<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in 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 into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*

*<sup>17</sup> "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! <sup>18</sup> I will arise 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 as one of your hired servants." <sup>20</sup> And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> 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.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.*

*<sup>25</sup> "Now (his older brother, excuse me) his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> But he was angry and refused to go*

*in. His father came out and entreated him,<sup>29</sup> but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'<sup>31</sup> And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.<sup>32</sup> It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.''' (ESV)*

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we get into Your Word this morning, I pray that this parable would have a powerful impact on hearts. And as we recognize what is being said here, and as You illuminate our hearts with understanding, we pray, Lord God, for the personal application to our own lives. Lead us and guide us, Lord, in all truth. We look to You to accomplish that. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

I'm willing to bet you've heard that term, the prodigal son many, many, times. It's used a lot in movies and books. Somebody will come home after being gone, and one of the characters will inevitably say, the prodigal son has returned. That's a common sort of a term. We've taken, I guess the word prodigal has taken on the connotation of a wanderer, somebody who returns home after a period of time. Originally, the word didn't mean that. Its original meaning is really a squanderer, not a wanderer. It literally refers to someone who wastes money or is wasteful with income or whatever.

Now, before we get into the parable as Jesus told it, it's probably important to remind ourselves why He told this parable. You'll remember that in the very first two verses of this chapter, the Bible tells us that, as Jesus was going around teaching, people began to gather to listen to him who were, I guess, on the cultural outs, if you will.

They were people who were notorious sinners. They were tax collectors, people that society basically hated because they lived blatant, sinful lifestyles. And these are the people who were gathering to hear Jesus, and the religious leaders were grumbling about it, about all these people coming and the fact that Jesus was receiving them and even sitting down and eating with them. So they had nothing good to say.

Jesus began to tell parables to speak to the attitude of the religious leaders, and this is the third of the three. You remember, they all had to do with something that was lost and then was ultimately found. The very first parable was a lost sheep, remember? And then the next one was a lost coin that was ultimately

found. And now we come to the parable of the prodigal son, where we're dealing with a lost human being, and it's a beautiful parable.

It begins with a father who has two sons, one of whom comes to him and says, dad, I want my inheritance now. I don't want to wait. And that's what we actually read in verse 12. Look with me in your Bible: *"The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.'"* And you need to know that in Jewish society, a family inheritance was something that was governed by certain laws and practices.

An elder son or the eldest son of the family would always receive a double portion. His portion was to be twice as big as the next oldest son. So, in other words, the oldest son received two-thirds of his father's estate, while the younger son—the son next in line—would receive one-third of the estate.

And we're told here that this youngest son comes to the father and says, I want it now. And he's basically saying to his father, dad, I'm tired of waiting for you to kick the bucket, and I want my money now, so give it to me now. In any parable, the characters in the parable become illustrative to you and I of certain characteristics, certain attitudes, and that sort of thing. Obviously, we can see here that this younger son is a picture of the person who wants to go their own way—the person who wants to run after the desires of the flesh, something I dare say we have all done.

And we'll talk here in a bit about how that turns out. But first, it's very interesting to look at the response of the father in this case. So the son comes to him and says, dad, I want my money now. I don't want to wait for you to die. And it says at the end of verse 12 if you look with me there, *"...And he divided his property between them."* Isn't that crazy?

I mean, as a dad, I would expect the father to, like, say something—to try to convince the son of a dumb decision or say, son, talk to me here. What's going on? What's happening in your life? What's happening in your heart? I mean, maybe we should talk this thing through. But it's interesting here; that's not what happens. The father just divides his inheritance, and that's it. So what are we to think about that, especially in light of the fact that we've already mentioned that these characters in this story are representative of different people?

The father is representative of God. Okay? So here we have Jesus, the Son of God, telling us a story where the father in the story represents God the Father, and he portrays God the Father as being approached in the person of this human father by his son, saying, I want my inheritance now, and the father just gives it. That's pretty interesting, isn't it?

Well, if nothing else, this speaks of just the amazing indulgence that God extends to his children, even when we're acting selfishly and foolishly. I wish it wasn't so, I wish it wasn't that way, but this is borne out in my life, and I bet it is in yours too. Some of the dumbest decisions I've made, some of the really, really, knuckleheaded directions I've taken in my life—God has let me take.

He's let me walk down that road. And the reason He does it, well there are several reasons, but one of them is because it is the freedom of our will that makes us uniquely human. He's not about to take that away from us. You know what I mean?

When you read in the Bible that you were created in the image of God, I hope you didn't think that meant you looked like God. Because that's not what that means. Essentially, when it says you were created in the image of God, it means that He gave you certain elements, communicated certain elements that only God can give.

And because He himself is free and completely without restraint, He could convey to his children that gift of a free will. And He gave us that freedom, and it pleased him very much to give us that freedom. He's not about to take it back.

So when you and I come up with some really dumb ideas about how we're going to live our lives, He'll let us do those. But there are some other reasons why God indulges us along those lines. Let me share a couple of others with you. Did you notice that in the story, once the father gave the young son the inheritance, it wasn't long before he packed up and headed out to a distant country?

So what he did is he physically got his stuff together and physically headed off for that other country, where he was going to blow all the money, living recklessly and foolishly. But God knows that when you and I do that very same thing, when we set out to go our own way, it's already been hatching in our mind and in our heart for a long time. We don't just suddenly do something. Things are birthed in our heart.

The desire of the heart begins to be nurtured and drawn out in us, and God knows that the physical act of whatever we do is simply evidence of what had been brewing in the heart. And I think that's one of the reasons God allows that.

When I see one of my kids doing something dumb, I would probably talk to them. I might even be able to guilt them into changing their mind for a while. But you know what I can't do? I can't change their heart. I can't change what's been brewing in their heart for a period of time. It's a heart condition that needs to be dealt with.

The second reason I believe God allows us to go our own way is because he knows, obviously, that the misuse of our freedom is not going to end well. It never does. And that's something you can't really explain to somebody ahead of time. When somebody is about to make a bad decision, you can tell them all day long, okay, now listen, this isn't going to go well. This isn't going to end well.

And they're like, don't worry, it'll be fine. I don't know about you, but that's the way I was, I'm sorry to say, particularly growing up. I didn't—I wasn't very good at taking advice when it came to people warning me about certain decisions in my life.

I pretty much had to experience the hardship firsthand in order to learn the lesson the hard way—what do they call it? The school of hard knocks or whatever. So what do we see the prodigal son doing here?

Again, verse 13, I want to make reference to this. It says, *“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...”*

Once again, this reference to a far country is a significant one. Because what it means is he would have gone beyond the borders of Israel, and he would have gone into probably a neighboring pagan nation, and there squandered his wealth.

So why did Jesus say it? Why did Jesus in the story say that he went to another country? Why didn't He just say he went to another town? Why didn't He have the son stay right there in Israel, but just go to a town where nobody knew him or whatever, and there squander his wealth? Why go to a distant country? Because remember, this is a parable. And parables have meaning.

The whole idea of a distant country means, I'm going to get away from individuals who might look down upon my lifestyle, who know the law, who know what God's Word has to say. I'm going to distance myself from them about as far as I can get so that I can be free to live the way I want to live, without being judged by others. I don't want to be judged. Who wants to be judged, right? So he goes off to a far country.

And of course, that's why when we backslide, or when we see people backslide, we see them staying away from church. They stopped coming to church. Who'd want to backslide and go to church? You're in the middle of backsliding, and you're going to be around all these people who are looking down their nose at you? That doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun to me. And that's why they stop reading their Bible—because they don't want the conviction. That's why they stop hanging out with their Christian friends.

It's the same picture that we're getting here of the prodigal son going to a distant country; I'm going to get away! I want to get away from the light that is being communicated to me through my Christian friends, through church services, through reading the Bible, because I want to be in the dark. Because when I'm in the dark, I don't have to sit and look at my personal condition, right?

We've talked about this many times in the past. Have you ever gotten dressed in the dark and then gotten to work and found out that your shirt or your pants had a stain or a rip? Of course, rips are in style, I guess—no big deal there. But heaven forbid you put on two different color socks or something stupid like that or whatever. But you couldn't tell because you were in the dark. But once you got to work and the lights were on bright, you suddenly looked and you're like, ah, I forgot I wore these pants when I was doing yard work yesterday, and there's grass stains on the knees, and I got dirt all over the back because I was sitting down in the garden or whatever. But you couldn't tell because it was dark. What happens when the light goes on? Suddenly we see what we really look like.

And when we're backsliding, we don't want to see what we really look like. That's why John the apostle wrote what he did in the third chapter of the gospel. Let me put it on the screen for you:

**John 3:20 (ESV)**

*For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

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Lest his life should be exposed for what it is.

So this son goes as far away from the light as he can possibly get. And there he squanders all that his father worked so hard to obtain over the years. And it goes on to say in verse 14, "*And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.*"

It tells us here that he became so desperate that he hired himself out to somebody living in that country, who hired him to go out into his fields and feed the pigs.

And we're told in verse 16 that while he was feeding the pigs, the food that he was giving them started to look really good. Obviously, he's beginning to starve, and that verse ends by saying, "...*(that) no one gave him anything.*"

This young man was reduced to a state of real desperation. He hired himself out in a job that no respectable Jewish person would have ever taken, because you remember pigs are unclean animals to the Jews. To make matters worse, it says at the end of that section that nobody would give him anything, which probably means that the friends he had while he was living in luxury and blowing his money had now abandoned him, and nobody was willing to help out.

And basically, what Jesus is doing here is painting for us another picture. It's a picture of the lost sinner—the picture of the person who runs away from God, runs away from the light of God's presence, and wants to live within the context of his own selfish desires. But what always happens is that a famine takes place—not a physical famine necessarily, but a spiritual famine.

And then slavery begins to take hold in that person's life. Just as this individual hired himself out to feed the pigs, there's a picture there of slavery and the giving up of freedom. And that's what happens when we give in to sin.

Let me show you another passage from John chapter 8 on the screen. It says,

**John 8:34 (ESV)**

*Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."*

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The word slave isn't something that is very politically correct to use a whole lot in our culture. I mean, we'll use it in very negative circumstances, but it's still a very harsh sort of a word. We have a word that we've put in place of slavery. We call it addiction.

We've even tried to whitewash that but addiction is slavery. If I'm addicted to something, I'm a slave to that thing, right? In my flesh. You can make it sound as nice as you want, but slavery was never meant to sound nice. It's a rotten, horrible way to live, and God doesn't want us to be in slavery.

Reading on, it says in verse 17 and I want you to take note of these words, "*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!'*"

He says in verse 18, *“I will arise 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 as one of your hired servants.’”*

Notice how the son practices what he’s going to say to his father when he gets home. And so I want to go back and just take note of those first few words of that section in verse 17. It says the son came to his senses or came to himself. That’s a very interesting phrase, isn’t it? He came to himself.

Misery and hardship have this really interesting way of getting our attention and causing us to think clearly. It’s not automatic for everybody. But for many, when they begin to go through total misery, it’s just really amazing how a lot of the junk that used to dominate our thoughts just melts away, and we begin seeing things as they really are. And that’s what he’s— see what’s happening to this young man. It says—he basically came to his senses and he begins to speak about what he needs to do.

And I want you to—before we talk about what he said he’s going to do, I want to bring up what he didn’t say, because what he didn’t say was, this is terrible! I need to figure out how I can improve life in this pigpen. Because I’ve actually seen people do that. I’ve seen people come to the place of understanding how difficult, how desperate, how miserable their lives really are. But instead of turning to God, they turn to self, and they try to figure out, what can I do about this?

And you’ll even hear people say, I got myself into this. I’ll get myself out. Right? You know what you’re doing? You’re just trying to improve the pigpen. We’re going to make this pigpen better here so that it’s not quite so smelly. Yeah, good luck. I don’t know how many of you have been around pigs. Who!

I know what I’m talking about. My brother-in-law has a pig farm back in Minnesota. We were just back there, as Sue said, thankfully, we didn’t have to go to the pig farm. I was glad about that because, man, I tell you, that will open up your sinuses like right now. I mean, whoosh! And you cannot get that smell out. As much as you try. It’s like, just take off your clothes and throw them away.

But he’s not trying to improve his situation by self-effort. This is something our world loves. You need one of those self-help booklets, and we’re going to help you fix up the pigpen and make it really cozy. Yeah, that’s really stupid, is what that is. He doesn’t do that. I love what he does.

Instead of blaming people, it says he simply responded by saying (and look at this in verse 18), *“I will arise and go to my father...”*



Guys, this is exactly what we need to do when we've been in a place of sin, when we've been living the way we know we shouldn't, and we've been made aware of it because of the misery or the difficulty or whatever.

Verse 18: *"I will arise and go to my father..."* That needs to be really the first thing that we do. I mean before you even go back to church, before you even go back hang out with your Christian friends, go back to your Father. Go back to God, come to Him first. Come to Him, confess your situation, return to your Father. That's why Jesus is telling the story this way. This is what we are to do.

And I want you to notice the attitude that he plans to go to his father with. He's not going to go to his father and say, yeah, Dad, boy, I tell you, life was hard. Oh, those people didn't treat me very good. That's terrible. I had to go work with pigs. And, oh man, those people are terrible. None of that.

He says in verse 18, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to go to my father. I'm going to say, dad, I've sinned against you, and I've sinned against God. And I'm not even worthy to be called your son. I am not even asking for you to take me back as your son. I am totally willing to come back and just be a hired hand. I'll work for you. Just, yeah, over there, yeah, where the servants live, I'll live there.

What he's saying though is he's saying, by just coming back to you, Dad, I'm going to now leave this life of slavery that I've been living in. Even as your servant, I'll be free. I'm willing to just be your servant, just so I can be free.

And that's what coming back to Jesus is all about when we've been embroiled in a sinful lifestyle. Coming back to Him is all about getting free—free from that life of fleshly domination. Choosing to put Christ back at the center of our lives. And when we do that, the Bible says that slavery to the flesh falls away, and we become slaves then to righteousness rather than slaves to impurity and sin (Romans 6:18-22).

And by the way, when you're a slave to God—and it's interesting, isn't it, that God uses that language? He actually uses the word slavery to describe our relationship to Him when we leave the life of the flesh. Do you know why? Because whatever word you use with God is a positive.

If you're a slave to God, that's a good thing. If you're a slave to the flesh, that's a bad thing. If you're a slave to God and a slave to righteousness, that's a good thing. You know why? Because there's no one who's really truly free except God. If you're His slave, that means you're free. I know it's a crazy sort of paradoxical sort of an idea, but when you are a slave to God, that's the only time in your life you'll ever be really truly free because He is the only one who is really truly free.

Let me show you a couple of passages from Romans, chapter 6. First of all, Paul writes,

**Romans 6:6-7 (ESV)**

*We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

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We know that our old self, the old self-indulgent, sinful life, was crucified along with Jesus. Why? In order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we would no longer be enslaved to our sinful passions. And he says, because if you've died, you've been set free from sin, right?

And then he goes on to say a little bit later on in the chapter,

**Romans 6:17-18 (ESV)**

*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slave of righteousness.*

*But thanks be to God, that you who were once (slaves to sin or) slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slave of righteousness.*

Isn't that cool? Slaves of righteousness. Well, I want to be a slave of God so that I can be free, and that's the only way I'll truly be free.

Here we go, verse 20: The kid got up and came back to his father. It tells us here though that while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and he ran and embraced him and kissed him. And that's saying something because the kid probably smelled like pigs.

But I want you to remember here again, this is Jesus telling a story, a parable, so that you and I will understand the heart of God. And the heart of God is portrayed here as waiting with anticipation for the son to return. How in the world do you see your son coming from a long way off unless you're waiting

for him, unless you're absolutely just looking, watching, waiting for him to come?

And this is what Jesus is communicating to you and I: the heart of God toward sinners who are returning to God, coming back and saying, I've had enough. I've had enough of myself. I've had enough of my own life, my own attempt to please myself, live for my own desires. I've had enough. And now I'm returning to you. What's God's heart? I think there are a lot of Christians, or even returning Christians or non-Christians, who wonder if God would even accept them.

I've had people say that straight out to me. They'll come up for prayer or something like that. I've just been living a horrible life. I don't think God will even accept me back. Pastor, you don't know what I've done. I'm sorry for what I did. I want to return to God, but I don't think—I don't think he wants me. Listen, that's the result of the enemy speaking into that person's ear. That's the whispering of the evil one.

You want to know the heart of God? It's right here. He's waiting. He's waiting with eager anticipation for that child to return. And when they do—smell of pigs or not—He throws his arms around that child, smothers them with kisses, and says, you are my child. Did you notice here that the son couldn't even get his whole speech out?

He had several things he wanted to say to his father. He only got the first part. The father interrupted him. It's like he's just, hang on, and he's telling the servants, go get a robe, go get some rings, go get some shoes, kill the calf; we're going to party. My son is back.

And you'll notice he's not sitting there going, what are you doing here? Fancy seeing you coming back. You stink. What did you think you were just going to get a big welcome home, living the way you've lived? I think there's a lot of people who wonder if perhaps that might be God's response to them. But that's not the heart of the father.

So he says in verse 21, "... *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.*" And the father says, that's okay, and he starts just saying, bring all these things, which are what you would do for a son, right? We need to celebrate.

He says in verse 24, "... *this my son was dead, and is alive again...*" Was his son really dead? Well, not physically, but the Bible talks about another kind of death, and if somebody is living a life that is just flat out lived for the flesh, they're dead even while they're alive.

Let me show you this passage from Ephesians chapter 2:

**Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)**

*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once live in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

*And you (Paul writes to the church in Ephesus) were (past tense) dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air (that's satan), the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once live (How were we living? We were living) in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind (and because of that), and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

But we turned away from that, didn't we? But we were dead before we did. And so the celebration goes on.

Verse 25 tells us that the older son is coming in from the field, working. As he gets close to the house, he hears music, people hooping it up, celebrating. So he calls one of the servants and asks, what's going on? The servant in verse 27 tells him, yeah, your brother came home. Your dad's all excited, killed the fatted calf because he's got him back safe and sound.

And at this, the older son becomes angry. In fact, he even refuses to go in and join the celebration which causes the father, we're told here in verse 28 to go out and speak to him about it.

But he responds to his father by saying, look, I have worked for you for years. I have served you with a whole heart. I've never disobeyed you. And you know what? I can't remember a time when you ever even gave me a goat to celebrate with my friends, and here you are—when this son of yours who blew all the income that you gave him as an inheritance on prostitutes comes home, you're ready to have a party!

You can tell that he's not happy because he felt the whole celebration was an insult to his own faithfulness. He felt insulted because they were having a party for his younger brother, so, he's angry with his father.

Now, here's the part that I'm not very proud of. There was a time in my life when I would read the prodigal son, and I felt like the older brother had a point. I did. I used to read this parable and think, yeah, what about that? What about

it? He's been faithful. And I was almost taking up an offense for the older brother. Isn't that stupid? But I learned over the years that my affinity for the attitude of the older brother was a result of my own pride and selfishness. Because, you see, pride and selfishness say, I deserve better than this.

Pride and selfishness say, what about me? What about me? I've been faithful. I've been working hard for you. I never asked anything of you. My brother goes off and does this, and you have a party. What about me? The older brother is a picture of the self-life, someone who is with the father but so far away from the father's heart.

Do you know that's possible? Do you know it's possible to come to church regularly and be really disconnected from the heart of the Father? From the way He feels about people when they repent and return, to the point where we're miffed? We're miffed. What about me? I deserve better than this. Because it's all about me. Well, that's the heart of the older son.

Have you ever noticed, by the way, that when somebody has lived a really notoriously sinful life, and then they turn to the Lord, we tend to doubt whether or not it really happened—whether they're really a Christian? I don't know if you've been following any of the hoopla with Kanye West?

If you don't know who Kanye West is, it's probably because you're older and out of it, but that's okay. Anyway, he's a rapper, a singer-songwriter, and a record producer, known for having some pretty raunchy lyrics in his music. But not that long ago, Kanye West came out claiming to be a born-again Christian.

What's interesting to me is the result of the Christian community speaking to this situation, because I've heard some voices that were filled with skepticism. Skepticism, they've looked at his past life. In fact, somebody actually put together a video of all of his raunchiest stuff and put it up, saying, yeah, right, a Christian. That's interesting, isn't it?

Well, let me tell you something. If you're going to point to somebody's past life and use that as a reason to doubt their faith today, then I guess maybe you should also doubt the Apostle Paul's conversion. Because he went around trying to arrest Christians. He was there when Stephen was stoned to death, and he was saying, yes, kill him. And then he came to Christ.

How did the Christian community react to Paul's conversion? Skepticism. It took Barnabas, didn't it? Barnabas had to take him by the hand and lead him to the apostles and say, you guys, he's the real deal! This man truly met Jesus Christ, and he is a different man.

And that's the bottom line of what it means to come to Christ. Listen, if we no longer believe that Jesus changes people, we're out of touch with the way we were before we knew the Lord. You and I better not let go of the idea that Jesus changes people's lives. He can transform the life of somebody who was in the middle of the most scuzziest rotten lifestyle that the world can imagine and bring them out of that lifestyle and into the light of his glorious presence.

We better believe that, and we better stop looking sideways at people who come out of those lifestyles and come to Christ, or we're going to deny the very power of God to change a life. And that would be a little bit of a problem. That would be a shame, wouldn't it?

Hey, listen. Jesus changes people. Get that in your heart. Jesus changes people. He transforms people. He doesn't save good people; he saves sinners and transforms them into his children. And that's the beauty of what it means to come to him.

So the father says to his son, "<sup>31</sup>...*Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.*" And what he's saying is there's no reason to begrudge your brother for returning. No reason to be resentful. By birthright, you already have everything.

And he says here as he ends, "<sup>32</sup>*It was fitting to celebrate...*" It's fitting. It's fitting to celebrate because your brother was dead and he's alive. He was lost and he's been found.

And obviously, the theme of this parable is all about the graciousness of God that overshadows all the foolishness and immorality of our lives. The prodigal son was looking to return home just to be a servant, and he was restored as a son. And the same is true for you and I as we come back to the Lord. We are restored as his children, and not just his children—his heirs. Ah, I can't even believe that.

Let me show you this passage from Romans 8, and we'll end with this. Paul writes,

**Romans 8:15-17 (ESV)**

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*

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Isn't that amazing? We're heirs of God. How do you even wrap your mind around that? It's almost impossible, isn't it?

Especially because most of us have seen the prodigal son in ourselves in some way, shape, or form. We've seen how we've gone to live in the world, just given ourselves to the flesh, and then how we turned from that lifestyle and said, Lord, I don't even deserve to be called your child. I'll just work for you, how about that? No, no.no. The father says, you are my child, and you have an inheritance. Wow. Let's stand and pray about that.

Is our God good, or what? Yeah, I tell you. We're going to have people down front here to pray with you if you need prayer this morning. Let's go to the Lord.

Heavenly Father, we are blown away by your goodness. We're blown away by your forgiveness, your tender compassion, Lord, watching for us to return. Father God, I pray that if there's anyone here who has recognized that they've been away from God, that they would not hesitate to come back to you and just cry out and say, Lord, I'm not worthy. I'm not worthy to even be called your child. I come to you in faith.

Lord, I pray for anyone here who is lifting up in prayer regularly a prodigal, whether it be a son or a daughter or a family member who has wandered away from the Lord. Lord, it's a tough thing to pray, but we ask, Lord, that the spiritual famine would become so severe that they would come to their senses and return to their Father.

Lord, we pray that you would help us also to reflect the heart of the Father toward all those who return. May we not be like the religious leaders of Jesus' day who were smug and grumbled and complained. Lord, I pray that we would celebrate, celebrate the return of every prodigal, every person who comes out of the world and says, I'm sick and tired of living for self, and I want to begin to live for the eternal God.

Help us, Lord God, to share your joy. We thank you, we praise you, we love you. In Jesus' precious name, and all God's people said, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday.