

The Extravagant Love of Our Heavenly Father

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Text: Luke 15:11-32¹

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Series: Father's Day

Introduction: Open your Bible to Luke 15:11-32. This morning I want to bring us to a parable that we've all known as the "prodigal son". It's the story of a younger brother who asks for his inheritance and recklessly wastes all that he has, and comes home to a forgiving father.

What is a prodigal? The dictionary defines prodigal as follows...

prod·i·gal

[prod-i-guhl]

–*adjective*

1. recklessly extravagant
2. giving or yielding profusely; lavish
3. lavishly abundant; profuse

–*noun*

4. a person who spends, or has spent, his or her money or substance with wasteful extravagance; spendthrift.

We read in **Luke 15:1-2**, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So Jesus tells three parables to demonstrate his mercy toward sinners and to show the blindness of the person who trusts in moralism or religion. He tells the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two lost sons. We are focusing on the parable of the two lost sons, sometimes referred to as the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

What we are going to see today is that God is the prodigal [the extravagant One] – the father in this story would have been seen in the Jewish culture as recklessly extravagant toward his wayward son. We are going to see that God is the extravagant father to all who repent. If you are religious or pagan here today, you must forsake your way for God's way. All of us need the mercy of God in Christ. All who trust in Him, both Jew and Gentile, both religious and pagan, will find that God's mercy and grace and everlasting kindness to us is nothing less than infinitely extravagant. As Paul says in **Ephesians 1:7-8**, "In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us".

I. **The Freeness of God's Extravagant Love.**

Luke 15:11, "And he [*Jesus*] said, "There was a man who had two sons." There are two sons in this parable.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are quoted from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

There are really two main characters in this story. They are both lost sons.

First we see the lost, reckless **younger brother** who corresponds to the “tax collectors and sinners [who] were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]” in **verse 1**. These people engaged in “reckless living”.² They don’t buy into the traditional morality of their families. They have rejected the religion of their parents and are living as pagans.

- A. The younger son’s **shocking request**. So the story begins with a short, but shocking request. **Luke 15:12**, “And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me’”. The original listeners would have been amazed. This request was a sign of deep disrespect. Normally the oldest son received a double portion of the inheritance. The younger, if there were only two, received a third. However, the division of the estate only occurred when the brother died. **To ask for the inheritance now was the same as to wish the father dead**. It was a way to end his relationship with his father.
- B. The father’s **shocking response**. **Luke 15:12**, “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”. A traditional Middle Eastern father would be expected to respond to such a request by disowning his son. Instead, the father responds with lavish love. Giving his son his inheritance would entail dismantling his lands and selling them. This would have been a great loss of honor for the father.
- C. The younger brother’s **shameful rebellion**. He wants his money now. He wants to use it as he wants. This points the request of the sinner to be as free as he can be from God, as free as he wants to be to fulfill his desires and his lusts. God gives the sinner just that freedom. You can take your sin as far as you want. You can make your life a train wreck if you want. You have that freedom.
 1. This son wanted no **Accountability**. **Verse 13a**, “Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country”. And now he wants to get as far away from his disgraceful actions as possible. He takes “...a journey into a far country”. He wanted to live exactly the way he wanted to live with nobody to care about him or know what he was doing. So he takes his fast cash and goes on a journey into a distant country leaving his homeland of Israel for a pagan Gentile land.
 2. But this son needed a quick **Liquidation**. **Verse 13b**, “there he squandered his property in reckless living”. So how do you liquidate in just a few days? The only way to do it is you have to sell cheap. So the younger son devalues his third of the property to get fast cash. That’s despicable! And then he takes a journey. Why?
 3. A family **Funeral**. By the way, according to the Jewish tradition, they would have had for this boy a full funeral. That’s why later in the story the father says, **verse 24**, “this my son was dead.” He was dead to the family. An actual funeral ceremony was conducted.

² Verse 13

4. **Wasted** His Life! Yes, “there he squandered his property in reckless living”. The word “wasted” means ‘scattered’ or ‘threw away’. That’s why he’s called the prodigal. The word means ‘wasteful’. He took his entire future, liquidated it at a discount, and then threw it away. What took generations to accumulate was wasted in a matter of a few months. He wasted his wealth with “reckless living”. What does that mean? It means depraved, lawless, out of control behavior. In fact the older brother in **verse 30** says that he “devoured your property with prostitutes”. He was shacking up and spending his money on prostitutes.

Up to this point all this is in his control. But in **verse 14**, we find out there are some things that are not in his control. “And when he had spent everything” (this is perfect timing—he’s got nothing left)...what happened?

5. A **Famine** brought him very low. **Verse 14**, “And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need”. This is something out of his control. And what happens in a famine? We don’t know much about famine in this country, but famine means total starvation.
- When there is a famine, people eat garbage, and when there is no more garbage to eat,
 - They would eat their sandals
 - after that they would eat stray or dead animals.

During famine times in Israel went under siege, the Jewish people even ate the afterbirth. This is life at the bottom.

6. And he becomes a **Beggar**, **verse 15**. “So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs”. The word “hired himself” is an interesting Greek word. It is the word “to glue” something. The younger son became a leach—a beggar! That's what beggars do.

He glued himself to this citizen, but the employer had absolutely no money to pay him. So the idea is that the poor citizen can't get rid of him. So finally he sent him what happens?

7. Feeding **Pigs**. **Verse 15**, his employer “sent him into his fields to feed pigs”. There was no real job there. He wasn’t getting paid. **Verse 16** says, “no one gave him anything”. It was just a ploy to get rid of him. And it gets worse.
8. He begins to **Starve** to death. **Verse 16**, he's out there herding and feeding unclean animals—pigs. And it says “he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate”. These husks are carob pods. He went out there maybe thinking he had a job, but no one gave him anything”. And now to survive, he has to fight the pigs for the carob pods that the pigs eat. But he can’t even eat too many of the carob pods before they make him sick. Pigs can digest them; people can’t. So a few attempts into eating carob pods, and he’d have to stop because he would get so sick.

D. The younger brother’s **sudden repentance**. He wants decides to repent to his father.

Luke 15:17-24, “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! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” 20 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. 21 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.’”

He’s now starving to death. He comes to the end of himself! He comes to his father realizing he’s not worthy to be a son. He’s alienated from him. Nothing can change this.

But we find God’s extravagant grace. The father was already looking for him. Every day, the father had compassion on his son. And so the father girded up the loins of his robe and ran to meet his son. He forgot all his dignity and went to the city gates, probably with tears steaming down his face. What love! And so our Heavenly Father sent His Son who lost all His dignity on a Cross, bearing the penalty for our sins. What extravagant love!

As reckless as this boy’s destruction was, so extravagant is God’s mercy. **Romans 5:20**, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”.

II. **The Costliness of God’s Extravagant Love.**

God is not that way. Aren’t you glad? Look at the father’s response to his son in **verses 22-24**, “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. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”

Immediately this son received the father’s best robe. This would have been out of place for the younger son to wear this. This robe was for the one who held the birthright, the elder son. And he was given a ring on his hand. That meant his inheritance was restored. Shoes were put on his feet, and then the fatted calf was killed and the entire town was invited to a great feast! There would be a celebration of great cost.

Our salvation is free to us, but it costs God everything! And truly the one in this parable who paid the price was the elder brother. Except, truly our elder brother is our Lord Jesus Christ!

- He did not give us a **robe** that will fall apart, but the robe of His perfect righteousness!
- We cannot melt down the signet **ring** He gives us. His ring is a sign of our inheritance. We are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”!
- And the sacrifice we have is not a fatted calf, but the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

All of this is entirely free to us, but it cost Christ everything. He is our true and perfect Elder Brother!

Transition: Now understand that the younger son's restoration was free for the son, but it cost the older brother quite a bit. In reality all of this was his. And had he truly had a godly relationship with his father, he would have rejoiced and gladly given all he had for his younger brother. His relationship was not based on love but strict legalism.

III. **The Rejection of God's Extravagant Love.**

Here we come to the older brother. He is lost. He doesn't care about looking for his younger brother. He is stingy and self-centered and wants everything for himself.

In **verse 2**, and in verses We see the lost, moral **older brother**. Both are lost! This brother corresponds to the "Pharisees and the scribes" in **verse 2** who were complaining. We read in **verse 1** that "the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him [Jesus]". The Pharisees and scribes complained and said, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (**verse 2**). To sit down and eat with someone in the ancient Near East was a token of welcoming and acceptance.

Now most people say the older son, he was the believer who was at home doing what he should. That's not true at all.

A. The elder brother had no **relationship** with the father. He was far off from his father in his heart.

Verse 25, "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing." – As the older son, he would have been the one to be planning the feast. But he was in the field. He likely would not have been working, but telling others in the field what to do. He should have been home planning the feast. But he had no relationship with the father.

Verse 26, "And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant." As the older brother, he was the heir of most of the estate. It was a fantastically massive estate. This is why he could be at one end of the estate and not know hundreds of people were flooding his house. As the older son he should have been planning the feast, but notice who he talks to in order to get information. "One of the servants!" What is going on?, he must be thinking. He is the

B. The elder brother **refuses** the extravagant invitation of the father.

Verses 26-28, "And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 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.' **28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.**"

His response to grace is wrong. "He was angry and refused to go in". The father is entreating him to go in, but he won't.

C. The elder brother **reveals** his true motivations for life.

Verse 29, “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’”. The older brother was only being moral for his own benefit. Here we see the radical self-centeredness of the human heart. His religion and obedience was actually rebellion. Anything not done ultimately for the glory of God is sin.

1. He addresses his father in disrespect. “Look”. The idea is that instead of calling him “Esteemed father” or just “Father”, he essentially said, “Look you!”
2. He says that he’s “slaved for years for his father”. He’s done exactly what he wanted. He’s never disobeyed his command.
3. But his motivation was self-centered. He wanted the goat. He wanted the celebration. It was about him and his friends.

How can we be delivered from the chains of lostness? Some may be like the younger brother. You look for joy in temporary pleasures. There may be someone here like the older brother. There is no joy, no assurance, no delight in God. You are slaving away for God but are really far away from Him.

Application: A person can take part in religious activities like Bible reading, prayers, and church attendance and have a heart that is very far away from God. These things can be a vehicle for human pride or fear—*trying to get something for myself*. “God has to accept me because I’m really trying”.

Can we all agree that God doesn’t save us based on anything we do? He saves us based on what Christ has done. Our assurance of salvation must be rooted in the Cross of Jesus Christ. There are many lost people who rely on the fact that they’ve heard many sermons or they know the preacher, or they come from a Christian home that will miss heaven.

Verse 28, “But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.”

What was it that kept the older brother from entering the feast? He could not accept grace. He could not accept something for nothing. It is a lack of trust in the goodness of God.

1. The elder brother loses his father’s love because of his goodness. The pride in his moral record is separating him from his father. He says, “Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.” (verse 29a). It’s not wrongdoing, but his self-righteousness that keeps him from sharing his father’s feast.
2. The elder brother is just as selfish as the younger brother. He wants the same thing. **Verse 29b**, “you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends”.

The hearts of the two brothers were the same. Neither son loved the father for himself. They both were using the father for their own self-centered ends rather than loving, enjoying, and serving him for his sake.

- The elder brother thought he had “rights” because of his obedience. If we seek to control God through our obedience, then all our morality is just a way to use God to make him give us things in life we really want.
 - Older brothers obey God to get things. They don’t obey God to get God Himself.
3. The elder brother is just as lost as the younger brother. **Verse 28**, “**But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him**”.
 4. The elder brother is jealous and unforgiving as we see in **verse 30**, “**But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!**”

He’s been good, so God should be good to him. Coming to Christ is a whole ‘nother attitude. We come to Christ realizing that under every sin is pride and self sufficiency. We have lived without giving glory to God.

Can Pharisees be saved? Paul was a Pharisee. He said in Philippians 3 that “regarding the law...[he was] blameless”. But he called himself the chief, the foremost of all sinners! Yes Pharisees can be saved, but they must come in broken contrition for their sin.

And it is not only a list of sins that we bring. Repentance is not less than that, but it is much more. We come to God turning from the control of our own life, and giving it into God’s hands. Satan’s temptation to Eve is the same to us today, “You shall be as gods”. You will be able to control your life! What a lie! We must yield control of our life to God.

IV. The Constant Invitation of God’s Extravagant Love.

Look at **verse 31**, “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

A. **God’s invitation to you today is to rejoice in grace.** For all intents and purposes, this son is dead—they have a funeral for him—and in the story he is described as being “alive again” (**verse 32**). And the Father puts on a bar-b-que, a celebration, and he invites the entire village. The Pharisees, represented by the older brother did not want to believe that they needed the same mercy that the younger, reckless brother did.

1. The **purpose** of the parable. This parable is directed to those who are like the older brother—the Pharisees. The Pharisees were good, conscientious, moral people. And sadly they were also very lost. This parable is Jesus’ plea to religious people to see their lost condition that they might change their heart.
2. The **shock** of this parable. The most shocking revelation of this parable is to see that the lost fall into two categories. It is not just the reckless sinner but also the moral sinner that needs a Savior. Jesus is reaching out to the moral and religious person to be born again.

3. The *response* to the parable. The original listeners of this parable were mainly the Pharisees who did not melt into tears, but were rather infuriated and offended! The Gospel when preached boldly will always cut the heart.
4. The *message* of this parable is that there is no difference between the religious person and the pagan. They are all under sin and need salvation in Christ. It is just

Paul makes the very same point in **Romans 3:9-12**, “What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, 10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

There are two types of people in the world that need salvation—the religious and the pagan. The point of this parable is to show that the religious need Christ just as much as the pagans. The reckless younger son needed Christ, but the moral older son needs Christ just as much – he just can’t see it!

Application: Listen to me today – both paganism and moralism are evil. Both are utterly self-centered. But what Jesus is saying in this parable is singling out moralism as a particularly deadly spiritual condition.

- B. What **kind of people** does our church draw? Jesus attracted the outcasts. Do we? In every case where the religious and the pagan come to Jesus, we find the religious offended by Jesus and the outcast attracted.
1. In Luke 7, the sexual outcast wipes Jesus’ feet with her tears, while the religious person is offended.
 2. In John 3- 4, the racial outcast – Samaritan woman – receives Jesus as Messiah, while Nicodemus, the religious leader can’t seem to understand the new birth.
 3. In Luke 19 and Mark 2, Jesus calls tax collectors like Zacchaeus and Matthew while the religious Pharisees look on in indignation.

What kind of message does our church send? Is our church a place where sinners can come for healing and love and transformation? Could you be described, like Jesus, as a “friend of sinners”?

The mission of Jesus is clear.

- He said in **Luke 19:10**, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
- Jesus said, “ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13).

What is Jesus’ message to the “elder brother” lost religious people? We find it in **Matthew 21:31**, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.”

Conclusion: Religion teaches that if I obey God enough I will be accepted by God. The Gospel operates on the principle: I'm accepted through what Jesus Christ has done, therefore I obey. My obedience does not make my standing better with God. It is a result of my love for Jesus.

So religion isn't just a little bit different than the Gospel – it is diametrically opposed to it. We see both religion and the Gospel in this parable in the older and younger brothers.

John Newton (1725–1807) was the captain of a slave ship. He was a rough young man with no care for anyone or anything but himself. But on May 10th, 1748 returning home during a storm he experienced a "great deliverance."

He had been a man who was prone to invent blasphemies, a slave trader, a murderer, a fornicator. Can God save someone like that?

Listen to Newton's own words:

*Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
Was **blind**, but now I see.*

But the one who God will not save is the one who has not come to the end of self.

What are you longing for? It will not be found in your rigorous keeping of religion. Neither will it be found in the prodigal's journey with this world's pleasures. It is found in Christ. Christ alone, the grace of God alone. It is found in the extravagant love of the Father!