

Guest Preacher- Rev. Gordon Matheson

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Preacher: Rev. Gordon Matheson

[0 : 00] Well, would you please turn with me in your Bibles back to Luke 15. Luke chapter 15.

We'll read again at verse 25. The older son was in the field, and he came and drew near to the house, and he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

He said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him back safe and sound. But he was angry and refused to go in.

The father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you. I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I may celebrate with my friends.

And when this son of yours, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him. And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

[1 : 14] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. And let's just pray briefly before we turn back to the word.

Heavenly Father, as we devote our attention for a short time this morning to your word, we do pray, Lord, that you would give us insight and wisdom, open hearts to receive, and the Spirit's power and function to help us.

Lord, we can't begin to probe the depths of human hearts, but we know that Jesus did. And what Jesus says in this chapter is very challenging to each and every one of us, or should be.

So we do pray today that you would open our hearts to receive the good news of the gospel. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Luke 15 is, I'm sure, one of these very well-known chapters in God's word.

It's got three very striking parables. The lost sheep, a story which I'm sure many of us, if not most, if not all, perhaps, of us knew from childhood.

[2 : 27] The story of the lost coin. And you see the picture narrowing in as the chapter goes on, from one in a hundred lost, to one in ten lost, to then one in two lost, as we reach the story of the prodigal son.

I'm sure many of us have heard sermons on the prodigal son as a remarkable story of the grace of God. And that's what it's meant to be. It's a reminder of the incredible grace of God, which leads to rejoicing.

And that's the bit we forget, I think. We preach, and I've done it myself, we preach these passages, we call on people to repent, they're very evangelistic sermons, invariably, and we forget very often the context.

And the context is really important. The opening verse tells us, tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus, and the Pharisees didn't like it.

And so they grumbled. And they were saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. And for them, that justified rejecting Jesus.

[3 : 38] How dare he receive sinners and be associated with them? He should be associated with us, righteous people, who are so much better.

And so actually, the key themes of the parables is not primarily the grace of God in seeking the lost. The key theme in the parable, and this is just a hint for you, just in terms of how you think about all of the parables, the thing about the parables that really stands out is the bit that's extraordinary in them.

It's not extraordinary that a shepherd would go looking for a sheep, or that a woman would go looking for a lost coin, or that, well, if you knew that culture, well, we'll come to this in a moment, but there's something wrong in the third story.

But what's extraordinary in each of them is the overwhelming joy. A shepherd who finds a lost sheep, even if it happened here in our community, if you find a lost sheep out in the moot, you're hardly going to go house to house on your way home, saying, come and rejoice with me, because I found my sheep that was lost.

You're hardly going to call your neighbors round because you found a lost coin in your house, or if you found something that was missing, something that was very important to you. But you know, if a son has returned, a son who has scorned and abused his father, comes back repentant, then maybe you would understand the joy then.

[5 : 12] And the point in this parable, the point of this chapter, is that our hearts need to be examined and challenged on the question, do we rejoice in the things God rejoices in?

Are you today rejoicing in the things God rejoices in? The Pharisees weren't.

They were very stubborn, hard-hearted men who rejected the joy of the Lord. Because Jesus rejoiced in sinners coming back to God.

Jesus rejoiced in sinners being found by a merciful God. God, that's what He was here to do. He came to seek and to save the lost. And He delighted in that.

And so today, I want to begin simply by stressing this to you. God delights in saving sinners. So I'm saying to the kids today, you might feel like you're very far away from God.

[6 : 20] He will go out and find you, even if He needs binoculars. You might feel you're too insignificant for God. You might feel like you're too small, too worthless, that you have nothing going for you.

And I would remind you again today, God diligently seeks with a magnifying glass those who feel that they are too insignificant to be saved. You might feel like you've wasted your life.

You might feel like you're the prodigal son, that you've run from God, that you've scorned and abused Him, that you fled from His presence. You might feel ashamed to come back to Him.

So ashamed, in fact, that the prodigal son wants to come back and says, I can't be considered your son anymore. I'll earn back my keep with you. Maybe that's the way you think about God today.

Maybe you think, God, I can just be good enough if I come back to you. And even people like that, who don't understand how the free grace, the free gift of God's grace works, the Father rejoices, because He comes out to find you.

[7 : 33] I want to stress, the Father delights in sinners who are found. The Father delights in bringing salvation to those who need it.

We come, though, in the parable, because it's one parable. They're not three separate parables. They're not told on three different occasions. They're not three independent stories. They are the same story.

We come to the end of it, and there's this interesting turn of events, because there is an older brother, it turns out. And the older brother has an awful lot going for him.

The older brother has many commendable traits. He has stayed at home. He's such a picture of contrast with his younger brother. The younger brother who has yearned for excitement and has yearned for the big city and all that the city has to offer.

The younger brother who has gone away and led a very profligate lifestyle. The older brother, in fact, when he was reporting on him at the end of the story, he says, he spent your money on prostitutes.

[8 : 36] You get the kind of impression this kind of boy is and what he's done. He's worked the farm. He's continued the family business. He has preserved the family's interest.

He's been the good son who stayed home and who's kept things going. Presumably, he's the one who's still now providing for the family. He's the one who's now running the farm. He's the one who is providing, presumably, for his father.

He's the one who's frugal. Even his statement to the father, you know, okay, you want to kill the fat calf for my brother who's come home. You wouldn't even let me kill just a goat.

He won't let me just even do a little party, a little bit of celebrating with my pals. And so you'd think that his frugality, his conservativeness with the family's resources, his rejection of the sort of rock and roll lifestyle of his brother makes him stand out as being the good son, the wise son.

So there's a lot of it on the face of it to commend him. And the father, when he comes out and speaks to him, commends him. The father speaks of all that he has done and makes clear that he has made lots of efforts.

[9 : 59] And I wonder today, does that describe you? Maybe you're not the lost sheep, the one who's wandered off and gone your own way. Maybe you're not the lost coin who feels insignificant and worthless.

Maybe you're not the prodigal son who's gone away and led a riotous life away from God. Maybe you're just a good person. Maybe your goodness, in fact, is really commendable. Maybe you've done a lot of good things in your life. Maybe everything has been the way you think it should be. But we have to know that this son, he actually stands condemned. He stands condemned. And the condemnation is quite obvious when you see it. Quite simply, he's just like his younger brother.

The younger brother, let's put it this way, the younger brother wanted the good of his father. The younger brother wanted everything his father could give him.

[11 : 19] But he wanted to run away with that, away from his father, and spend it the way he wanted. So he wants to flee with the father's wealth.

He doesn't want the father. He wants what the father can give him, and he wants to take it away, away from the father. And actually, the older brother is kind of just the same.

The older brother, similarly, wants the good that the father can give him, but crucially, he doesn't want the father.

He doesn't want what the father wants. He doesn't want the father's company. He doesn't want the father's presence.

He wants rid of the father, just like the younger son did. Let me show you how. The crucial thing actually is, or one of the crucial things to see it, is that statement about the young goat.

[12 : 26] When he wants to celebrate, he doesn't want to celebrate with his father. He wants to celebrate with his friends.

He might not want to go as far away as his younger brother did, but nonetheless, he wanted to be away from his father. He didn't want his father to be part of the picture.

So that's one of the first things. Another thing is, he doesn't share the father's concerns. And in that culture, it's really telling.

This would have been very obvious to Jesus' listeners of this parable in the first century in Palestine, because actually, the older brother in this setting, in this situation, the older brother is the one who was responsible.

Once the wealth is divided between an older brother who gets a double share and a younger brother who takes a smaller share, the older brother becomes the manager. He's the one in charge.

[13 : 28] He takes over the role of the father at this point. And so it's his responsibility to make sure the younger son stays in line, that if the younger son does something foolish, it's the older brother's responsibility to make sure he stays in check.

He's the one who carries the responsibility for the family's reputation. And he has begun to do that because he has some inside information.

Remember what he says about his younger brother. This son of yours, when he's speaking to his father, he says, this son of yours has gone and wasted your wealth, wasted our possessions on prostitutes.

He knows full well what his younger brother's been up to. He's been keeping tabs on him. But he doesn't share the father's concern.

Had the father known, what would he have done? Had the father known, he would have gone for that young son. We've already established that. That's the pattern in this parable. The father, the one who seeks, the good shepherd, he will go to extreme lengths to recover one sheep that is lost.

[14 : 38] The woman who's lost a coin, she will go to extreme lengths to recover the coin that is lost. The father would have gone to extreme lengths to recover his son who was lost.

But the brother doesn't share that. Instead, he looks down his nose and he judges. Isn't that so human? Isn't that so normal?

When we see someone going off the rails, part of our response to that is just judgment, tutting.

They had it coming. We see what's going wrong. He doesn't share the father's love for his younger brother.

And perhaps most damning of all is he shames his father.

[15 : 41] You see it when the father comes out. It's really interesting that the dynamics of the relationships here are really telling.

The father is lavishing his delight and his joy over his young son's return. And so, everyone who has been brought into that party will be aware that suddenly the father is no longer visible in the party. He's had to go out somewhere. He's had to depart. Why has he had to go out? Because his other son has refused his invitation. The other son has stood back in his arrogance outside and said, I'm not going in to talk to you, Dad. You come out here and talk to me. He's basically saying everything is about my terms, not yours. [16:42] Your terms, no, I'm having nothing to do with it. I won't share your joy. I don't love my brother. I don't share the love you have for him.

You can come out and talk to me. And that humiliates the father. It pours scorn upon him. And yet, the father comes.

Because although this is an abominable son, this older son, there is really nothing left. Once you start to see what he's really like, once you start to unpick his character, you see it is profoundly ugly. There is nothing left that says this guy is commendable in any way. And the village would have shamed him.

The village would have had nothing to do with him. And that's the whole point of the parable, isn't it? Because the parable begins like this. The tax collectors and the sinners are all coming near to hear Jesus.

[17:49] And the Pharisees and the scribes are grumbling, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. I wonder, does that describe any of us today? We're quite self-assured about our own goodness.

We might think we've been diligent and we've done everything well. but actually we don't delight and share in the joy of God.

We don't share in the delight of the Father who is bringing sinners back to Himself. We don't share in the mission of God.

We don't go out to find the lost. We just sit and pass judgment on them. We don't weep tears of joy over sinners repenting.

We just tut at the awfulness of things that we see happening around us. We don't realize that actually we're just the same.

[18:56] We're men and women and boys and girls today who need the love of God the Father in our lives. Who need the mercy and the grace of God overflowing in our lives.

And yet we think we're too good for it. And we want God to come and speak to us on our terms and do what we want. And yet we want to see as well in the story the Father.

Because the Father is remarkable. And this is the incredible thing about our God today. He comes out.

He comes out. He's already done it in fact for the older brother for the younger brother sorry. When the younger brother is still a far away returning to the farm.

This is before he's the picture if you can imagine it is he's coming across the moor but he hasn't arrived in the village yet. And the father sees him coming. And you might think well the father's going out joyfully to receive him.

[20:13] The father's going joyfully to embrace him and to throw his arms around him and to tell him how much he loves him. And all of that is true but the father is doing more than that. The father is going out to rescue the son.

Because again in Jesus' culture and it's well attested that son was going to come within an inch of his life if he went anywhere near his father's house.

Figuratively in fact the village what the villagers would do is they would take clay pots and they would smash them over the head of the son as he drew into the village. Because they knew how much he had shamed his father and how much of a wicked son he had been and how much he had humiliated his father and to show their disapproval and to make clear the son's unworthiness to return even an attempt to drive him off to spare the father from having to welcome his son back to spare the father from having to do anything costly the village would have said get out get away you're not welcome here and yet the father it's such in Jewish first century Palestinian culture it's such an undignified thing to do it would be undignified today as well it's like basically the father kind of runs out the house in his underwear and he runs to embrace his son he has to hitch up his loincloths and his garments and kind of run out this old man such an undignified scene running out through the village and they're all thinking where's he going but if he beats the villagers to his son

his son is saved his son is rescued and that's the love of the father in this parable it's the same love of the shepherd that goes out looking for the lost sheep it's the same love of the woman who goes out looking for the lost coin it's now that love that's been expressed that says

I need to save my lost son the son isn't saved because he decided to come back that's a mistake I think that sometimes preachers make in this passage the son isn't saved because he came to his senses the son is saved because the father intercepts him and he's rescued in the love of the father's embrace and that's us today the father has loved us he has gone out to seek us and to save us and the way he does it is he sends an older brother for us and that's the truth of Luke 15 there is an older brother who does the seeking who does the saving there's an older brother who doesn't sit back and scorn and mock us for our sin he goes and finds us and Jesus brings us back now before you feel deflated today and defeated and despairing perhaps let me say to you simply this even if you are the older brother today the father shows grace and Jesus was showing grace to the Pharisees mercifully some of the

Pharisees responded Nicodemus responds he was a Pharisee Paul was a Pharisee they had the same attitudes the same self-righteousness the same pride but grace saved them because the father came out to them and showed them his love and it's the same for each one of us today even if you are a self-righteous stuck-up prig the father today comes out to you the father comes and entreats you begs you will you not come and share my joy the father is seeking another lost son the father has gone out to bring another son in to share in his joy and today that's true of every single one of us the father is seeking to bring us in to his joy so will you not come will you not come and enjoy life from the dead will you not come and enjoy a home and security from the lostness that your sin has brought you to it is a simple invitation to the father's love and joy let's pray our father in heaven we thank you today for your great love we thank you that you are seeking to save lost sinners you are seeking to bring them to yourself and we want to thank you father for the way in which you do this you send an older brother to rescue us so we thank you today for

[25 : 31] Jesus that he was diligent in that work I want to pray today Lord just as well I made it to pray earlier but I want to pray for Murdo's ongoing ministry this weekend as he's inducted as minister over in in Nockbane and North Kessick I pray father that the same faithfulness that characterized his ministry here will characterize his ministry there that the same fruit that accompanied his ministry here would accompany it there as well that the same God who has blessed his ministry here would bless his ministry there and that we would see the harvest being brought in we thank you for him and for his ministry and we pray for his future and the future of this congregation in Jesus name Amen we're going to sing in conclusion in Psalm 130 this is in the Scottish Psalter version page 421 of the blue psalm book page 421

Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear and to my supplication's voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand if thou a Lord should mark iniquity but yet with thee forgivenesses that feared thou mayest be let's stand and sing the whole psalm to God's priest Lord from the dead to thee I cry my voice Lord do thou hear unto my supplication's voice give an attentive ear

Lord who shall stand with thou o Lord to spark in ear with thee but yet with thee forgiveness is the fear thou mayest be I wait for God my soul doth wait my hope is in his word Lord thou may that for morning watch my soul waits for the

Lord I say for thou may thou do watch watch the morning night to see let Israel open the Lord for with him mercy mercy be and let he us redemption is ever found within!

and from all his iniquities he is shall redeem Israel redeemed!

[30 : 18] Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and always. Amen. Amen.